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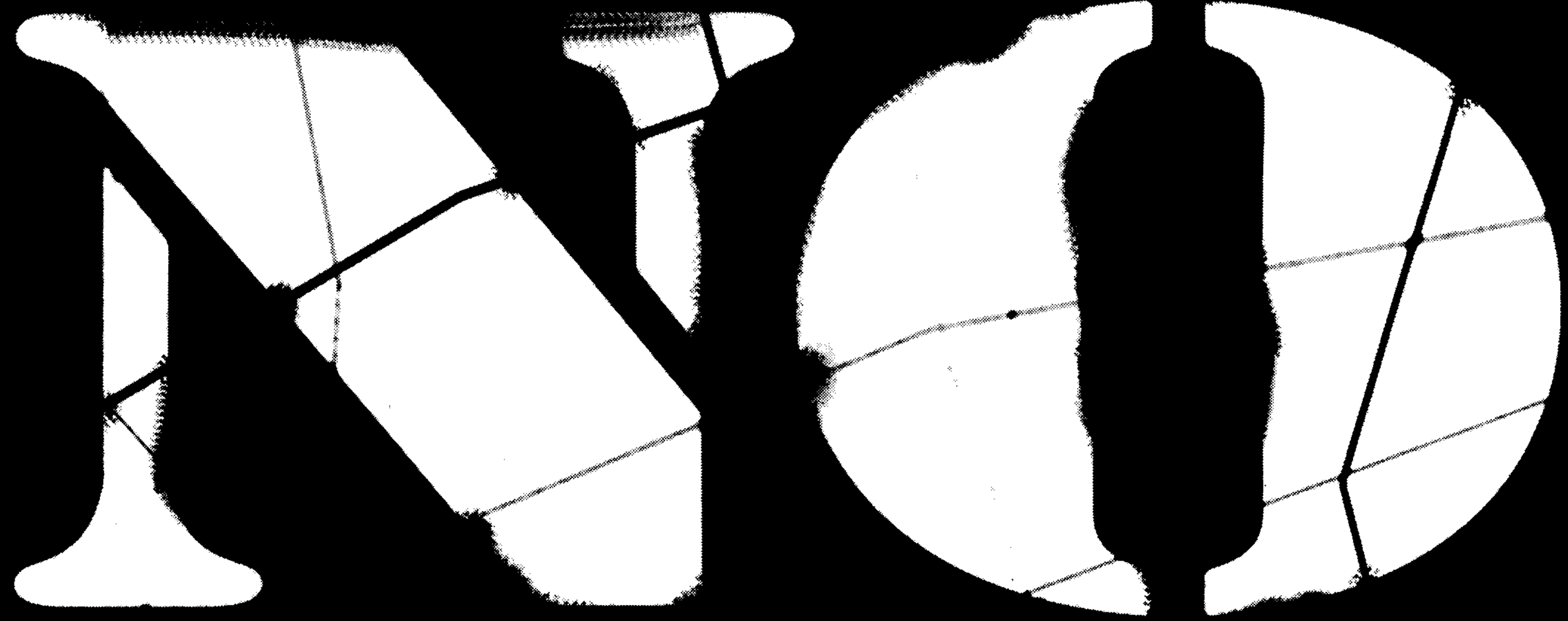

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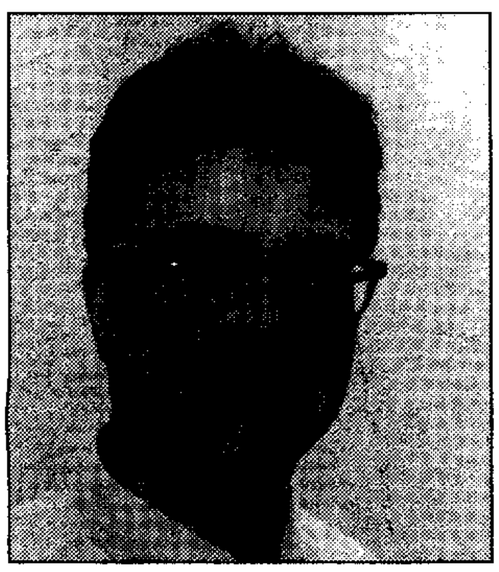

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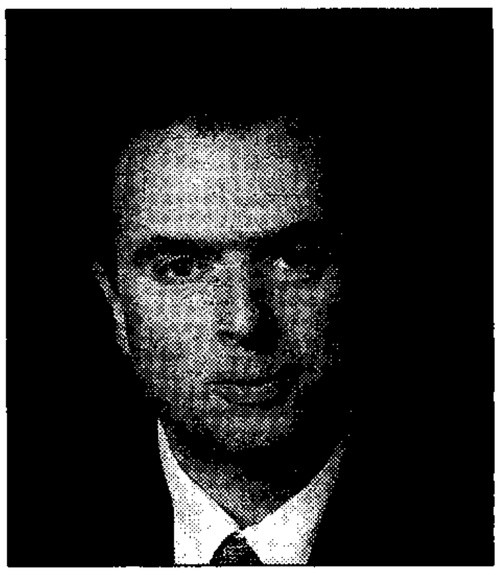
But if you enjoy good, raw argument, with no prisoners taken, we think you will.

Within weeks of our launch, we attracted the attention of two of Britain's leading radio reviewers, Tracey Macleod and Gillian Reynolds. Their words weren't honeyed - Tracey claimed we sounded like a duet between Orville and Orson Welles - but we still take them as a compliment. Here are some of the other things they said.

"Draper soon proved he could be as effective an exponent of Rottweiler radio as his co-host, Peter Hitchens. Expert witnesses were lined up, duffed up and booted off."

"Cheerfully shooting each other down in flames, the presenters rubbished each other's arguments, then courteously stood aside to allow the other to rubbish the arguments of the next caller."



"Draper and Hitchens are able to marshal facts and figures to back up their opinions, rather than just cutting callers off when challenged, as their peers tend to do."

"Each does a little set-piece introduction to the successive segments of the argument (a bit like the old Stop the Week, but more raw), studio guests come in to insert a word of expertise, listeners compete to rant. It's either appalling or totally hilarious, depending on how strong your stomach is."

talk radio
1053/1089am

PETER HITCHENS OF THE EXPRESS AND DEREK DRAPER OF NEW LABOUR 10AM-12AM, SUNDAYS

Gnome

HUGE queues are already forming outside Gnome House for the world's biggest ever exhibition of Money. Money has been collected from all over the world, including pieces that have never been seen before, such as:

- A very rare 2 million dollar banknote, believed to be the only one of its kind.
- A French Security Bond valued at 10 billion francs, never previously shown to the public.
- A Bank of Scotland personal cheque for 30 billion pounds with a picture on it of the water lilies at Lord Gnome's famous villa at Givenchy-Pour-Homme.

In addition to the existing exhibits, all the Money collected from members of the public paying the £90 entry fee will immediately go on display in a special "Mon-arium".

The success of the Exhibition is proof of the universal power of Money to draw people into galleries who know nothing about art.

As the Gnome Family has always maintained, "We're only in it for the Monet".

E. Strobes,
pp. Lord Gnome,
The Royal Academy,
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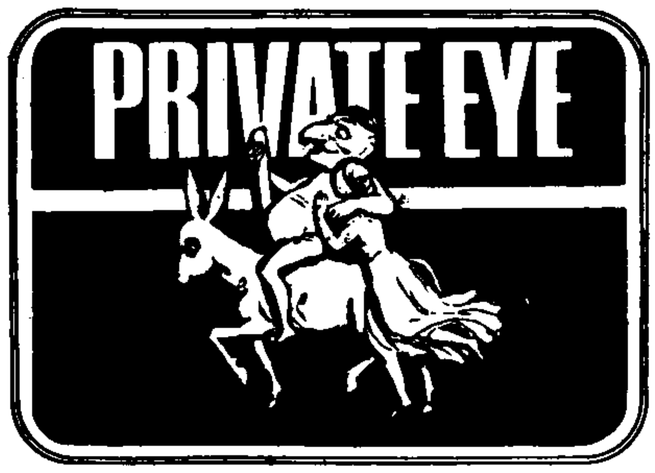

COLOUR SECTION

ONE of the last letters to arrive at the Macpherson inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence was written by an Asian officer in the Metropolitan police, Sgt Gurpal Virdi. He had a story to tell which started with a racist attack uncannily similar to the one on Stephen Lawrence.

Late at night last March, Sgt Virdi was on duty in Hanwell, west London, when he took an emergency call that two lads had been stabbed in the street. He went straight to the scene where a young Iraqi was lying on the pavement bleeding heavily. His friend, who had been stabbed less severely, told the officer that the couple had been attacked by five white youths, whom he described.

Sgt Virdi and his colleagues gave the young men first aid and put the Iraqi in an ambulance which arrived almost at once. The sergeant then went in search of the assailants. Three had already been found and Sgt Virdi found the other two skulking in a back street. He arrested them, took them to Ealing police station. He went to the hospital where the Iraqi boy was close to death. He got the stabbed boy's address and went to tell his mother about the attack. Later still, he went back to Hanwell and found the knife which had been used in the stabbing.

He left the case in the hands of the Ealing CID and when he next checked up on it, he was horrified. All five of the accused youths had been released on bail and the attack had not been classified as racist. Mr Virdi complained that this was wrong — the attack was plainly racist, he insisted, since the youths had taunted the two boys, urging them to get out of the area and push off to areas where there were more black people.

He was told he was interfering — to which he replied that he was one of the arresting officers. Soon afterwards he went on holiday for 10 days. On the day of his return, as he took his children to the dentist, he was surprised to find himself followed by some of his police colleagues. Later that day he was arrested and hauled off to the police station where he was accused of sending out racist mail. The previous December (1997) all black and Asian officers in the area had received hate mail proclaiming that black police were "not wanted". Mr Virdi was accused of sending out the mail from his computer in the police station and "perverting the course of justice" — two charges he contemptuously denied. He was released on police bail.

That was on 15 April. Ever since, Sgt Virdi has been suspended, kicking his heels at home and waiting for some information from his colleagues as to whether or not he is to be charged. In the summer the attack on the two young men was suddenly reclassified as a racist incident — as Sgt Virdi had recommended.

In October three of the five youths arrested were convicted of offences ranging from grievous bodily harm to affray. On 18 December, they came up for sentence. The stabber got four years' youth custody. The other two were put on probation.

Noting that the deadline for communication with the Lawrence inquiry was 20 December, Sgt Virdi wrote at once, setting out the facts and expressing his view where the police went wrong. He asked this question. If officers like him who show some concern for the victims of racist attacks and dare to criticise their seniors on the subject are treated as he has been, what hope is there for the anti-racist police and the victims of racist gangs?

THE government's dedication to "continuity" in high places was in evidence once again just before Christmas when Barbara Roche, the slavishly loyal minister at the department of trade and industry, announced the appointment of the chairman of the department's new highly-promoted quango, the Industrial Development Advisory Board (IDAB). He is Sir Anthony Cleaver.

Cleaver is a former chairman of the Conservative Association at Fareham, Hants, and was a favourite of the Tory government. In 1993 he was made head of the Atomic Energy Authority (AEA), with instructions to privatise as much as possible. Cleaver concentrated his attention on the AEA's nuclear site at Dounreay in Northern Scotland, introducing private contractors wherever he could. Finally he managed to hive off almost half the enterprise. The privatised half, AEA Technology PLC, was duly chaired by... Sir Anthony Cleaver.

The manic privatisation was accompanied by the usual wave of redundancies, which in turn were followed by a series of health and safety alarms. In June 1998, after an electrical power failure in the fuel cycle area, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) conducted a three-week audit of the Dounreay plant. "Our main finding," said the report, "is that the organisational changes made within he UKAEA over the last four years have so weakened the management and technical base of Dounreay that it is not in a good position to tackle its principal mission, which is the decommissioning of the site."

The "drive towards contractorisation" meant that the AEA "was not in control, nor was it in a position to understand the safety significance of the contractor's activity". In other words, privatisation had been an utter disaster, and a dangerous one at that. What better qualification could there be for its mastermind to be appointed by "new" Labour to a quango supervising the regeneration of the economy?

PS: Two other members of the IDAB are well known to *Eye* readers. Sir Malcolm Bates is the man who drafted the former Tory government's policy on the private finance initiative (PFI), which was taken up so enthusiastically by the present government. One of the first hospitals to be PFI'd was the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh, where the main private contractor to scoop up the rich hospital sites round the city was BICC, whose board was later joined by, er, Sir Malcolm Bates. Sir Malcolm was knighted by "new" Labour for his services to industry last year.

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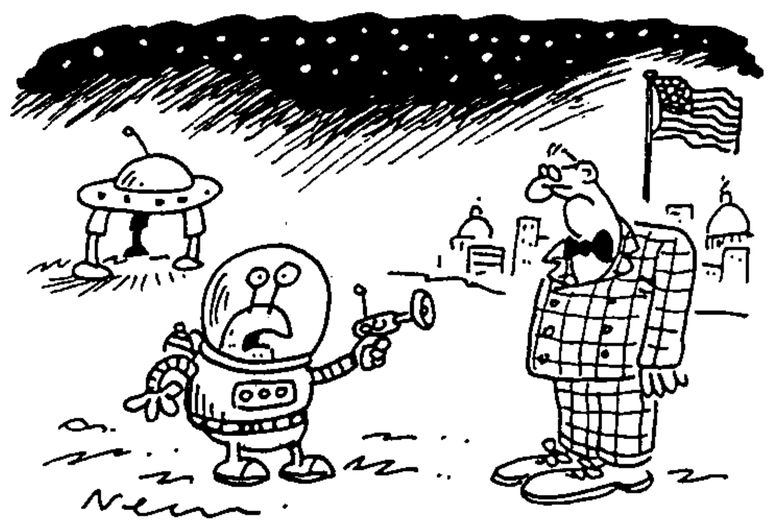


"Take me to your Liar"

Street of Shame

IT IS less than a year since the *Mirror* helped arrange the theft of Princess Diana's *billets doux* to James "love-rat" Hewitt. In an editorial justifying its crime, the paper explained that though Hewitt hadn't actually sold or published the letters, the very fact that he had kept them was appalling enough.

"Yesterday the *Mirror* revealed it had handed over to Kensington Palace the love letters which Diana sent to James Hewitt," it declared on 3 April last year. "We said we would not publish the intimate words she wrote to the treacherous rat she once loved. And nor will we ever do so." To print her private correspondence would be "the ultimate betrayal of Diana".

Can this high-minded, public-spirited tabloid by any chance be related to the paper which this week filled six pages with quotes from "the remarkable and moving" private letters sent by the Princess to another friend, in which she discussed her feelings for Prince Charles?

HOW EXCLUSIVES WORK

"The government is poised to give a 12 percent rise to the lowest-paid nurses and a 5 percent increase to other NHS staff in an attempt to boost recruitment and retention of key clinical workers, *Public Finance* has learned."

— *Public Finance* magazine, 15 January.

"ANOTHER *SUN* EXCLUSIVE: Rookie nurses are set to get a whopping 11 per cent pay rise, the *Sun* can reveal... Experienced colleagues will also be quids in under top secret recommendations by the Pay Review Body... They will get 4.7 per cent."

— Front-page "scoop" in the *Sun*, 18 January.

***SUN* film reviewer Nick Fisher, in his round-up of movies to watch out for in '99, forecasts "an epic year for British film".**

He particularly likes *Virtual Sexuality*, due for release in May, a "teenage comedy romance starring gorgeous Laura Fraser", which he describes as "a virtual leap forward for the British film industry". Fisher alas does not have space to reveal that the screenplay is written by, er, Nick Fisher.

Shurely a fact which should have been declared? Fisher doesn't think so. "You could argue that I should have been less modest about it," he tells the *Eye*. "I suppose there might be a problem when the film comes out and I have to review it."

We can hardly wait.

FANS of Fulham football club (prop: M. Fayed) went to their team's away fixture at Gillingham just before Christmas in a sombre mood.

At the equivalent fixture last season Fulham supporter Matthew Fox was stabbed to death during a fight involving 50 rival fans outside the Southern Bell pub.

Fulham fans were not impressed, therefore, with the *Evening Standard*'s Friday night London football preview, which gives useful information on the forthcoming weekend's matches. The Gillingham-Fulham match preview stated: "Recommended pub: the Southern Bell."

"The new carpet's arrived. Get your shoes off..."

BROKEN MIRROR

THE onward march of David "Rommel" Montgomery, chief executive of Mirror Group newspapers, continues.

Having presided over a catastrophic decline in all his national newspapers, a £500m debt and collapse in the group's share price, Rommel now faces the fury of his shareholders who cannot understand why they are still getting such a rotten return for their money.

Their fury led to discussions with Trinity, another large newspaper group, and widespread agreement about a proposed merger. The only problem was the role of Montgomery. Trinity wanted him removed from all executive power in the merged company, but Montgomery was determined to cling on.

Mirror Group vigorously denied that Montgomery was the problem, but no sooner was the ink dry on the denial than a Trinity spokesman was quoted on the front page of the *Financial Times* on 18 January saying: "We like the fit, and want to do the deal, but it is very difficult if not impossible to do a deal if it includes David." Unabashed Rommel announced: "I am absolutely delighted to be identified by Trinity as a blocking obstacle."

Trinity made it clear that it would not take part in a bidding war for Mirror Group. As it appeared to drop out, another bidder even more galling for Montgomery appeared on the horizon: Regional Independent Media, which owns the *Yorkshire Post* and almost all the newspapers in and around Leeds and Sheffield.

RIM was formed last year in a buy-out of the old United Provincial Newspaper group by the Canadian-owned venture capitalist combine Candover Investments. Its chairman, Sir Norman Fowler, the Tory MP for Sutton Coldfield and shadow home secretary, and its chief executive Chris Oakley had moved across from Midland Independent Newspapers (*Birmingham Post*, *Coventry Evening Telegraph*) which had, a few months previously, been bought out by, er, the Mirror Group.

Fowler and Oakley cheerfully abandoned the Midlands group for their new Yorkshire pudding. Internal company documents leaked last November made it clear the new RIM combine would pay for itself and its directors by the time-honoured method of smashing what was left of the trade unions and sacking a quarter of the staff. Which it has started doing.

Some defiant journalists have suggested that savings could be made by slashing the fat cat salaries of higher management and getting rid of luxuries like the executive boxes retained by the company at vast expense at local football stadia and theatres. This of course makes the frontbench Conservative Fowler furious.

Now Fowler's company is lining up to take over the Mirror, with its three large-circulation national papers, all famous for their loyalty to Labour. Without a trace of irony the offer letter from RIM which was handed to Mirror chairman Sir Victor Blank on 16 January promised that "the political stance of the Mirror Group" under its new frontbench Tory chairman would "remain unchanged".

Friday 32th December 1998

AOL NetFind

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, believes the forthcoming publication of a book by his former wife could fatally damage his career."

— Patrick Wintour, first edition of the *Observer*, 10 Jan.

"The Foreign Secretary remains confident that he will survive the onslaught."

— Patrick Wintour, later editions of the *Observer*, 10 Jan.

"Cook and his staff have decided to make no private or public comment about the book."

— Patrick Wintour, first edition of the *Observer*, 10 Jan.

"A friend authorised to speak for him [i.e. John Williams, Cook's official spin-doctor] said: `Anyone who knew Robin Cook said it was simply not believable that he had a drink problem'... A Cook source [Williams again] also said it was fantasy that he believed either he or the Prime Minister had sold their souls to the devil."

— Patrick Wintour, later editions of the *Observer*, 10 Jan.

THE latest spate of gushing articles about twentysomething self-made tycoons has brought yet more puffs for the publicity-magnet Justin Etzin.

A *Times* feature last month reported that the "multi-millionaire" party-organiser was now diversifying into property, nightclubs, a hotel in the Seychelles and a chain of themed bars. "These would be remarkable achievements under any circumstances," it gushed, "but what makes Etzin's success all the more extraordinary is his tender age. Etzin is only 22."

Similar pieces have appeared in the *Sunday Times*, London *Evening Standard* and elsewhere. In *Tatler* he was likened to Jimmy Goldsmith (a compliment, apparently) and said to be worth £6m. "I've had no real setbacks," he boasted.

Really? Records at Companies House reveal that an outfit called Capital VIP Group Ltd (director: Justin Etzin) was voluntarily wound up in September 1997 with debts of £131,490. In view of Etzin's claim in the *Times* that he organises corporate events for "the likes of Coca-Cola" it may also be worth noting that the single largest creditor — owed £24,000 — was, er, Coca-Cola.

When we pointed this out during the last eruption of Etzin puff-pieces (*Eye* 946) we received several angry phone calls from his ubiquitous PR man, Michael Ricardo-Hall, who warned that the boy wonder was consulting his lawyers. Nothing more was heard of this threat; and with any luck nothing more will be heard from Ricardo-Hall. Documents recently filed at Companies House show that Ricardo-Hall Communications Ltd was wound up under the insolvency act two months ago.

1.00 Dark Skies
1.55 FILM: We Don't Wank to Talk About It (1993)

The Observer (Leamington & Warwick)

THE many talents of *Sunday Telegraph* hackette Rebecca Tyrrel now also include clairvoyance, to judge by her columns published two days after both Christmas Day and new year.

Tyrrel wrote in great detail about what her husband and family "did" after the festivities and how they spent new year's eve, even down to their shopping lists, conversations, "jokes", moods, etc.

Most impressive — not least because the issues in which these two columns appeared were both printed before Christmas and the new year. Can it be long before she replaces the mag's resident astrologer, Psychic Psmith?

PAUL ROUTLEDGE and the *Mirror* continue to peddle the myth that *Grauniad* hack David Hencke got his scoop about Peter Mandelson's home-loan via a pilfered proof-copy of Routers's book *Mandy*. In fact Hencke's story came from an entirely different source.

PS: The so-called mystery about who opened the jiffy-bag containing Routledge's page-proofs is no mystery at all. The culprit was Rachel Sylvester, political correspondent of the *Independent on Sunday*.

NEW OLD SAYINGS

All's well that ends Whelan

WHO GUARDS THE GUARDIAN?

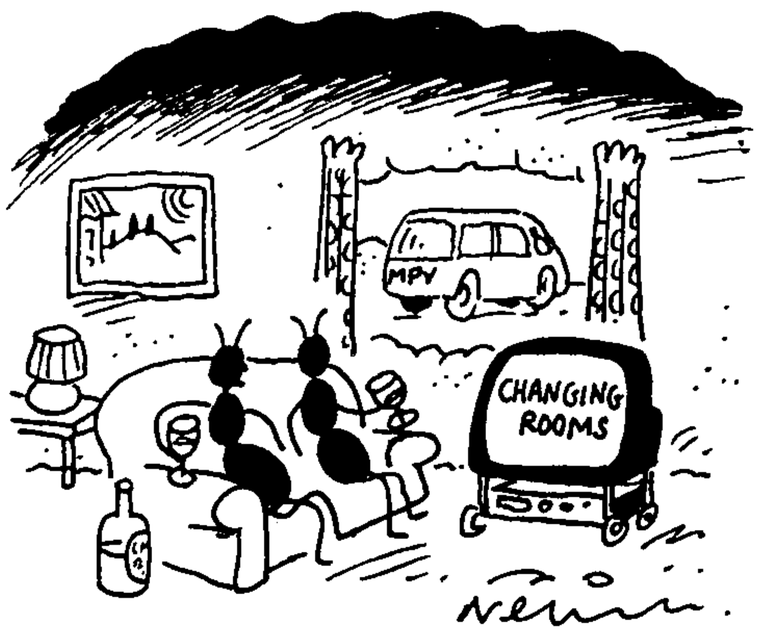
PAMELA MEADOWS, one of the "wise women" on the *Guardian*'s panel of economic experts, offers readers her predictions for the coming year. "Female-headed businesses also tend to be well placed to withstand a drop in demand," she observes. "They are less likely to die... less vulnerable to cash flow difficulties."

Pam should know. Though she is described as a visiting fellow at the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, when initially appointed to the panel she was director of the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) and described as such.

Until a couple of years ago the PSI was a much-respected think tank with a staff of 70. It had survived for well over half a century without undue financial turbulence. But then along came Pam "Lavish McTavish" Meadows. In the year 1996-7 the institute somehow managed to lose £600,000 — no mean feat on a turnover of £3m. Total collapse was finally triggered when she "forgot" about the existence of an outstanding bill for £430,000.

The chairman of the trustees, veteran quango expert Sir Len Peach, had no doubt who was responsible for effectively bankrupting the PSI. "Pam must, as chief executive, take the major blame for the failure in process and control systems which produced the crisis," he wrote to a colleague.

The PSI was baled out and taken over by the University of Westminster (whose court of governors, by an amazing coincidence, is chaired by Sir Len Peach). But it is a shadow of its former self, with only about half a dozen of the original staff remaining. So much for "female-headed businesses" being immune to cash-flow difficulties. Some of Pam's ex-employees doubt that she could even run a female-headed whelk-stall.



"We don't consider ourselves worker ants any more"

THE CURSE OF BLAIR

THE Seychelles government has solved the problem of the man who embarrassingly pointed out that the luxurious holiday hideaway where the Blairs stayed at Christmas had been stolen from his family — by deporting him.

The 726-acre L'Union estate on the island of La Digue was confiscated by the government in 1981, four years after President Albert Rene seized power in a Marxist coup. The estate's owner, Herbert Mittermayer, an electronics millionaire, had bought the property for £1.5m in the 1970s and spent a similar sum renovating the rundown plantation estate. He was never compensated and the estate, where the Blairs' holiday cost the taxpayer £40,000, is now worth about £14m.

While the Blairs were in the Seychelles Herbert Mittermayer's son Klaus protested that the Blairs were "staying on stolen property". He was preparing a court action against the Seychelles government, which has offered the family the value at the time of the seizure.

Mr Mittermayer's protests will have to be conducted from a distance in future. Rene has just had him deported to Germany. That's what you get for embarrassing Tony's chums!

SMACKWATCH

SUNDAY Mirror

BACK in 1981 *Washington Post* hackette Janet Cooke won a Pulitzer Prize for her harrowing interview with an eight-year-old heroin addict called Jimmy. The local police and education officials launched a desperate search for the boy, but with no success. Eventually a tearful Cooke confessed that he didn't exist. She returned her Pulitzer and resigned from the paper in disgrace.

Nearly 20 years on, the ghost of Jimmy has reappeared in the unlikely setting of Goole, East Yorkshire. "ADDICTED TO HEROIN AGED 8 *Tragedy of Britain's Youngest-Ever Junkie,*" screamed the *Sunday Mirror*'s front-page headline on 3 January. It was "the story that shames our nation".

The hyperbole continued through much of the paper. "Goole looms out of the mists of the River Humber like a landlocked ship," veteran *Mirror* hack Colin Wills noted, staking his own claim to a Pulitzer for purple prose. "But Goole will never again be just another name on a road sign. It will always have the power to cause a shudder. The reason will strike terror into the hearts of every parent in Britain..."

There was also an article by home office minister Mike O'Brien ("the *Sunday Mirror*'s story about an eight-year-old addicted to heroin graphically illustrates the tragedy of drug abuse") and a long editorial praising its own scoop as a "chilling indictment" of something or other. "How can it happen?" the paper wailed. "Who is to blame? And what can we do?"

One thing the *Sunday Mirror* could do is to check its facts. Even the age of the young junkie seemed uncertain: in the leader and the front-page splash he was an eight-year-old, but Colin Wills's report claimed that the boy was in fact nine.

There was also a curious lack of details in the extensive coverage. Though the front page carried a photo of a youngster with his face blanked out, implying that this was the lad in question, it soon became obvious that the *Mirror* had never clapped eyes on him. It had no quotes from the boy, or his parents, or their neighbours, or anyone who knows him; no indication of whether or not he goes to school, and if so where. But the paper did reveal that he was now being treated by a local doctor.

Any GP dealing with a young addict would surely have approached the local experts at the Goole Alcohol and Drugs Service for advice. Yet no nurse, counsellor or consultant at the clinic has ever heard of such a case.

The GP would also have a statutory duty under the children's act to inform social services — and either they or the education department would then call in a child psychologist. Neither social services nor the local child psychologists have any knowledge of the boy.

And what of Inspector Knacker? Presumably he is hot on the trail of the suppliers who corrupted this innocent? Er, apparently not. "I don't know anyone who knows that this child exists," Inspector Ian Guy of Goole police tells the *Eye*.

Dr Paul Hewish, a Goole GP who specialises in drug abuse, became increasingly suspicious. At a meeting of local GPs, with at least one doctor from every practice present, he asked about the boy. There were blank looks all round. Nor could he find any chemist in the area who had dispensed methadone to an eight-year-old, as might be expected if he really was "undergoing treatment for addiction".

Four days after the story appeared, Dr Hewish was visited by the *Sunday Mirror*'s crime correspondent, Tim Luckett, who seemed rather apologetic about his paper's sensationalism and said that he had been sent up to "sort things out". According to Dr Hewish, "he left me with the impression that there would be some sort of retraction the next Sunday".

Far from it. Instead, the *Mirror* repeated its "heart-wrenching story", adding for good measure an equally ridiculous shock-horror report from the nearby village of Moorends, whose total population of 4,500 was said to include "250 teenage heroin addicts".

Why should we believe that the notorious eight-year-old is any less fictional than Peter Pan and Wendy, or indeed the *Washington Post*'s Jimmy? The *Sunday Mirror* cites two sources. Ian Cawsey, Labour MP for Goole and Brigg, informed the paper that he "learned of his [the boy's] tragic story first-hand from the doctor who is looking after him".

Not so. "It's all bloody rubbish," Cawsey tells the *Eye*. More than a year ago a local policeman told him of rumours that there was a very young addict in the town, and Cawsey alluded to it in a speech at the time. But he doesn't know anyone who has ever met the boy.

The *Mirror*'s other corroboration came from chief inspector Colin Andrews, who had also talked to the boy's GP and thought it "diabolical that a child of that age has been offered drugs by someone". Alas! Chief Inspector Andrews has now written a letter to the paper complaining that "the article portrays Goole to be a small town awash with drugs and a place of desperation. That is certainly not the case." More specifically, he insists that "I have no personal knowledge whether or not the eight-year-old child does exist".

Nevertheless Andrews himself may be partly to blame for the *Sunday Mirror*'s extravagant fantasy. Shortly before Christmas he happened to mention the elusive eight-year-old while briefing a few local journalists on the drug problem — assuming, rather naively, that no reputable hack would run such a tale without first checking and confirming it. Little did he guess that his throwaway remark would appear only two weeks later, without any proof whatever, all over the front page of a mass-market tabloid. Not so much "the story that shames our nation"; merely another story from the Street of Shame.

O·B·N

Their arms were linked, their heads tilted towards each other, and they looked at each other when they spoke... Edward knows all about the stage, and yesterday it was his theatre.

PAUL HARRIS
(on the royal engagement)
Daily Mail

NEW LABOUR COURT CIRCULAR (OFFICIAL)

GORDON likes Robin, John, Derry and especially Peter. He also has a lot of time for Mo and has never coveted Tony's job.

Robin is fond of Gordon, as is John. They all think highly of Margaret. Robin likes Margaret — but not the one who wrote a book about him. Robin and John miss Harriet intensely and Gordon's biggest regret is that Frank is no longer around with all his very helpful ideas.

Robin has never wanted Gordon's job. Should Robin ever want it, all he has to do is ask. Darling Alistair really likes Gordon and Tony and they both like him. Alistair is just an immensely popular guy!

Gordon, Robin, John and Jack have a high opinion of Derry and Derry believes that Tony is lucky to have such a united team. Donald and Derry are just very old friends! Gordon, Robin, John, David, Chris, Clare and Mo sorely miss Peter. They all believe that Peter paid a high price for an error of judgement and look forward to having him back as soon as possible.

Peter misses everyone, especially Gordon and his always helpful and polite assistant, Charlie. Everyone is united in missing Geoffrey now that they have to pay the milkman themselves. And everyone likes Tony. All speak as one in welcoming his wise appointment of Stephen and Alan to replace Peter and Geoffrey (and Dawn — whoever she is!)

Gordon, John and Robin are especially looking forward to working with the two new boys and listening to their exciting ideas. Gordon, Robin and John are right behind Tony!

NEW LABOUR COURT CIRCULAR (UNOFFICIAL)

GORDON still hates Robin, Derry and especially Peter. But he will humour John for the time being. He still doesn't like Mo and hasn't given up on Tony's job.

Robin still hates Gordon. Nearly as much as he hates Margaret (the one who wrote a book about him).

John still doesn't like Gordon and Robin. In fact John doesn't really like anyone. Robin and John were delighted when Harriet got the chop, while Gordon just pretended to be sad. Gordon didn't have to pretend to be anything when Frank got the push.

Robin still fancies Gordon's job, but chance would be a fine thing. No one likes Alistair, and it is highly unlikely that anyone ever will.

Gordon, Robin, John and Jack have only contempt for Derry and Derry hates them. But Donald especially hates Derry and Derry especially hates Donald. Gordon, John, Robin, David, Margaret, Chris, Clare and Mo couldn't stop laughing when Peter went. Only Tony was sad. Robin and Peter split their sides when Geoffrey and Charlie went. Tony didn't really understand what all the cheering was about.

Gordon hates Stephen and nobody trusts slippery Alan. And Tony despises them all. Tony does however like Roy, Paddy and Menzies. In fact he likes them so much he wants to move in with them. Because of this, Gordon, Robin and John are right behind Tony as never before...

'Cassius'

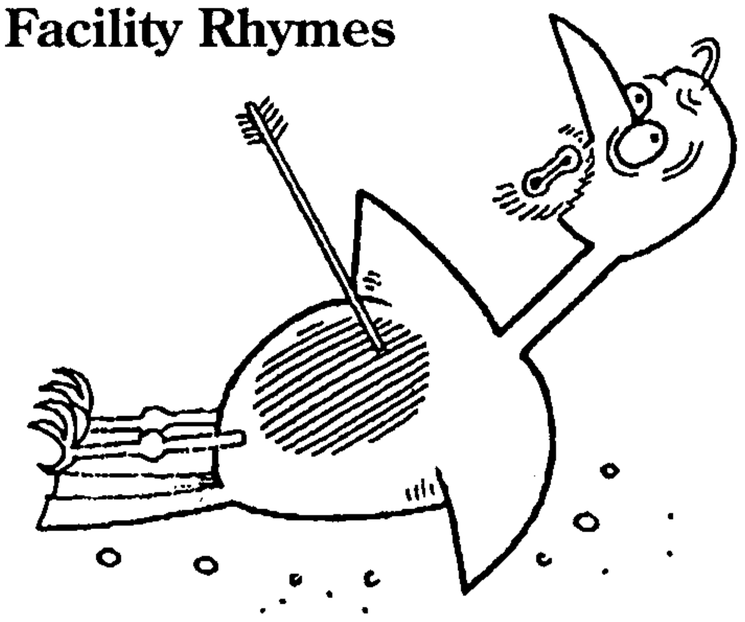
FACED with a prospect of almost completely free labour, a bunch of secure contracts, free water, free telephones and free electricity, even the private prison company Wackenhut reckoned it might make a profit.

Thus in November 1997 it accepted government "incentives" and started to run the newly-privatised engineering and sign-making businesses at Coldingley prison in Surrey.

The takeover was accompanied by the usual hype about a new sales force, closer management and heavy investment in capital and plant. None of these things materialised. The businesses started to make a loss and went firmly into the red, chalking up monthly deficits of £40,000.

An audit report last year exposed the heavy taxpayers' subsidies for these losses, and a reluctant prison service was forced to end the contract. Half the taxpayers' loan has still not been repaid. But none of this has dimmed "new" Labour's enthusiasm for Wackenhut. On 17 December Jack Straw's home office announced a new $100m contract to "tag" 15,000 prisoners a year in London, the Midlands and East Anglia.

Pre-School Nursery Facility Rhymes



Who killed Cocky Robin?
I, said Mrs Cook
With my little book... *(Trad.)*

AT LAST year's Tory conference the boy-wonder William Hague promised to double membership of the party within two years, adding that half the new members would be younger than 35 — no small task as the average age at the moment is a youthful 62.

To achieve this he merged the warring youth factions of the YCs (preferred leader: M. Portillo) and the Students (preferred leader: K. Clarke) into one new group, Conservative Future. But due to the party's slight problems with its bank manager, Conservative Future wasn't given any money to recruit the new members.

At the last board meeting the leadership of Conservative Future threatened to resign *en masse* in protest, but stopped at the last minute when the party chairman warned that it would be the end of their political aspirations. (Good to see that there are still some young idealists willing to put their careers before their principles.) It is now expected that a more "disciplined" team of sycophants will be appointed later this year.

Meanwhile Hague has quietly dropped his pledge to recruit more young people, having belatedly discovered that few if any of the new members want him as their leader.

THE *Independent on Sunday*'s revelations about Edward Heath's financial interests in China were greeted with typical grumpiness by the former prime minister, who made two points.

First that the curious lumping of his interests under the mysterious Dumpton Gap company had been cleared by Sir Gordon Downey, parliamentary standards commissioner; and second that he did not have to give the details of his employment if it had nothing to do with his work as an MP.

A spokesman for the Commons standards committee dealt with these points as follows:

1 There was correspondence and at least one telephone call between Sir Edward and Sir Gordon. I cannot say that either resulted in a meeting of minds.

2 This is rubbish. All outside employment has to be registered, whether or not it connects with the MPs work as an MP.

THE rehabilitation of Ron Davies has begun in earnest. This Friday the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds will be unveiling its "agenda" for the Welsh assembly elections at a lunch in Cardiff, and a press release from RSPB Cymru reveals that "the document will be launched by the Rt Hon Ron Davies MP, architect of Welsh devolution and former council member of the RSPB".

Amid all the squillions of words written about Davies at the time of his downfall this enthusiasm for bird-watching was somehow overlooked. If only he had mentioned it earlier he might have been spared much embarrassment: what could be more natural than for a dedicated "twitcher" to lurk in the bushes on Clapham Common in the hope of glimpsing the lesser-spotted Rasta?

FIRST there was the Labour party's pledge to end tobacco sponsorship in sport. Then there was the climbdown, as ministers accepted Bernie Ecclestone's argument that the motor-racing business would move abroad if deprived of its much-needed millions from the ciggie manufacturers.

Now from the foreign office (FCO) — which itself inspired such noted brands as Embassy and Consulate — comes a glossy 36-page brochure extolling the virtues of the motor-sport industry, to be distributed by British diplomats throughout the world. The brochure boasts that Britain "occupies the undisputed leading position" in motor-sport, and that the sector comprises almost 4,000 companies employing 150,000 people, with a turnover exceeding £1.5bn.

Rather surprisingly, given its alleged significance, there is nothing in the text about the crucial role played by tobacco sponsorship. More impressively still, only one of the 39 photos features a car bearing the logo of a cigarette brand — and that's an American Indycar.

Has the government belatedly discovered that tobacco sponsorship wasn't so important after all? Or is it simply too embarrassed by the ghost of Bernie Ecclestone to mention the subject?

IN THE TEAROOM

THERE's nothing like a spot of wishful thinking to get the new year off to a hopeful start.

First, John Prescott forecasts a cultural revolution — farewell "new" Labour, goodbye Paddy Pantsdown, the decline of spin-doctoring, a return to cloth caps socialism, back in the bottom drawer with "the project".

Then up pops pert Rosie Winterton (gorgeous, pouting face of the Prescott tendency) forecasting a long spell on the backbenches for Peter Mandelson; a view foolishly endorsed by Tom Sawyer (who should know better). Now Charlie Whelan's predicting his arch enemy Alastair Campbell is next in line for the chop. They just don't get it, do they?

Luckily there are steadying influences in the tearoom, like number 10 nark Fraser Kemp and newly promoted Brownite Michael Wills, who can provide a reality check. Who runs the country? Tony runs the country, not some cabinet collective. The instruments of his power are Alastair Campbell and Jonathan Powell and an obedient Labour national executive committee.

Labour will stay "new" and increasingly become middle-class, because that's the only way to win in places like Swindon. Despite the Mandelson affair, the Margaret Cook book and even Jack Cunningham's expenses, Tony is smelling of roses. No administration has ever been so popular at this stage of the electoral cycle. That proves big Al's brand of spin-doctoring works and he deserves a medal. Geddit?

As for Mandy, he has abandoned ambitions of replacing Robin Cook and Gordon Brown. Why? Because Blair told him to prepare for an exciting new job instead, that's why. He may be out of office but he sure ain't out of the loop. He had his wilderness years under John Smith and will never go through that pained exile again. Once he's completed a grand tour of continental chancelleries, met the "successor generation" of European leaders and helped ease us in to the euro, it will be time to break up the foreign office and have a Europe secretary with cabinet rank. That will be Mandy. It's time to face up to it: there's no stopping him.

'Urquhart'

LEGAL NEWS

THE many obsequious obituaries of the late Judge Michael Argyle have overlooked some of the landmarks of his legal career.

The celebrated *OZ* obscenity trial in 1971 has been passed over without reference to Argyle's recommendations that the convicted defendants should have haircuts and psychiatric treatment, nor to the judge's desperate pleas to the authorities to protect him from death threats which he alleged he received from the "friends of *OZ*" — a not very shadowy organisation comprising such sinister champions of violence as John Lennon, Marty Feldman, George Melly and John Peel.

When Argyle produced letters threatening to kill him, the authorities panicked and agreed to put him up first at the Savoy Hotel and then the Dorchester.

Extensive security services were deployed at vast expense to protect the judge from the potential juridicides. Argyle got so attached to the service at these hotels that he moved on to the Grosvenor House without first getting the permission of the authorities. When he refused to pay the bill and the hotel issued a writ against him demanding £11,500, the lord chancellor's office once again took fright at the consequences of an embarrassing legal action between the hotel and the judge, and agreed to stump up the money.

Not long afterwards it emerged that the threatening letters were written not by potential murderers but by a Mrs Blackaller, the wife of Argyle's clerk. She was prosecuted for wasting 1,200 hours of police time. She pleaded guilty and was put on probation.

No judge in recent history has had more judgments reversed or sentences reduced on appeal than Argyle. His record loony sentence was eight years for consensual heterosexual sodomy, a crime which no longer exists. The guilty man, like the *OZ* defendants, got out of prison as fast as the court of appeal could meet. Nor was Argyle one to forget his triumphs after his retirement. He went round the world lecturing for an organisation of which he was chairman called Restore the Death Penalty Inc. In the *Spectator* four years ago he returned to his greatest triumph, the *OZ* trial, in an article which secured from the *Spectator* the most desperate and grovelling apology in all its history.

Number crunchings

3 years ■ Time in prison for third-time burglars under Jack Straw's new legislation

3 years ■ time it took Jack Straw to come round to Michael Howard's views on third-time burglars

THE revelations in the *Independent* that the Labour guru of the 1960s and 1970s Lord Arnold Goodman "systematically pilfered" money from the client account of Lord Portman, recall a curious incident involving the *Eye*.

Eye 255 (25 September 1971) reported that Lord Goodman's bank account at Barclays in the Strand was overdrawn by a sum not far short of £20,000 (the actual sum was £17,000). The issue of the *Eye* was presented to Lord Goodman as he came down the steps of his plane at Heathrow on his return from Rhodesia where he had been negotiating on behalf of the British prime minister Edward Heath.

Goodman flew into the most terrible rage and summoned the *Eye*'s editor, author and lawyer to the offices of Goodman Derrick. He ranged around his room bellowing about the "most monstrous libel" and that he was going to "finish you lot off once and for all". Eventually, when it was agreed that the facts were correct, and suggested that the *Eye* might have other information (which we hadn't), he calmed down. A compromise was reached in which the *Eye* made clear in the next issue that the overdrawn account was not Lord Goodman's but belonged to "a nominee". The *Indie* revelations now clarify that this was the Portman account which Lord Goodman was pilfering.

PS: The *Indie* exposes the bizarre deal whereby, after receiving a writ for the money he stole, Goodman agreed to pay £500,000 in exchange for public silence about the affair. The ransom may have been even bigger since the Portmans also inherited Lucian Freud's portrait of Goodman, which was worth at least £700,000.

Housewife and mother Keely Gambell, who eats daily in McDonalds, spending £70 a week on their food said: "I think it's disgusting.

Richmond & Twickenham Times

NOOKS and CORNERS

MY picture is historical... and desperately sad. For it depicts what is surely the worst architectural loss of 1998. The photograph shows the interior of the church of St Brandon in Brancepeth, County Durham — a medieval building refurnished in the 17th century by John Cosin, the rector from 1626 to 1640, who went on to be the celebrated Bishop of Durham who filled the cathedral with magnificent furnishings — some of which survive.

The work of Brancepeth was a sort of prototype for these, for it mixed Gothic and Baroque in a witty, spiky way that was characteristic of the time. Brancepeth Church was, indeed, one of the most glorious in Britain, and most rare and special.

And now it is no more. RIP. Almost all of this wonderful woodwork went up in flames a few months ago, allowing Brancepeth to join that distinguished list of historic buildings recently set on fire by workmen: St Mary-at-Hill, Uppark, Windsor Castle... In fact the most dangerous time for an old building is when it is being "restored".

At least in this case a good record exists of what the interior looked like: there are 90 photographs of it at the National Monuments Record, including detailed studies of the woodwork taken in 1967. So it will be possible to recreate the interior. No, the result would not be authentic but it would be an interesting and challenging exercise in historic scholarship and modern craftsmanship. If done well, it would be convincing and interesting in its own right. And surely worthwhile, as early 17th century church interiors are as rare as they are special. A good project for the millennium, surely, with the help of heritage lottery money.

So is Brancepeth Church to be restored? Well, no, actually. The priest-in-charge, Canon Adrian Dorber, thinks that would be backward-looking. Much better to take advantage of the fire, make a clean sweep, start afresh... and create an exciting modern setting for worship. That is what the millennium is all about, after all: looking forward, and not caring about 2,000 years of Christianity. In fact what he ought to do is ask Richard Rogers to put a plastic dome over the ruin, to create a worship centre for the new millennium, the twenty-first century. Cool!

TALKING of My Lord Rogers of Riverside, on 6 January the Daily Telegraph published a letter in defence of the Centre Pompidou in Paris which he had designed back in the 1960s (along with a lot of other less important people, including Renzo Piano).

An unhelpful article by Giles Worsley had earlier commented on the fact that the structure was now undergoing a massive, multi-million franc refurbishment after a mere 30 years of use. Now the Telegraph allowed an official at the Pompidou Centre to put the record straight and — in a surprising gesture of Europhilia — allowed him to do so in French. Under the heading "A la défense de Milord Rogers", he pointed out that the concept of the building was absolutely wonderful, that everybody loved it and that "Lord Riverside est un très grand architecte. Son talent honor le Royaume-Uni." Well, quite.

Mr Worsley's disrespectful article also mentioned the alleged failings of a more recent masterpiece by the celebrated bronzed 'n' relaxed litigant: the new law courts in Bordeaux, properly called the Tribunal de Grande Instance. This is a work in the latest style from the Rogers' office: lots of glass, and an overall wavy glass roof, through which protrude some concrete cooling towers.

But all is not well with the glass: at least a quarter of the glass fins which support the glass façade have broken, allowing great and potentially lethal shards to crash to the ground. To protect the unfortunate human beings who might have to use the building (which has not yet been officially opened), it has now been shrouded in white plastic — making it look like a monument wrapped up by Christo — while engineers commissioned by the ministry of justice in Paris investigate the problems and decide whom to sue.

My Lord Rogers has reacted to these negative stories in the press with characteristic insouciance and generosity. He cannot be bothered to take legal action against the newspapers: "Life's too short," he says. And another high-powered Frenchman, M. Eladeri, who is in charge of all law court buildings in France, was moved to write to the scandalmongering Daily Telegraph to complain of "unjustified criticism" and to confirm that, "as to the functionality and aesthetic quality of the building... it is a great success." So there. I mean, you cannot expect the French government to admit it might have made a mistake in going to a fashionable superstar, can you?

The building's design was severely criticised in the French newspaper Le Point last month, which noted that the justice ministry, overstretched financially and having already shelled out 450 million francs for the building, had no intention of paying an additional five million francs to make good the shortcomings.

In fact, in this case I have some sympathy for the architects. Technical problems often occur in new buildings in which novel techniques or forms of construction are tried out. We all advance by our mistakes. Just a pity that it is the client who pays for them.

'Piloti'

LORD ARCHER RHYMING SLANG

Rosie Lee — "Oxford" degree

FTVE

The Vanessa Show
Sunburn
Holby City
(all BBC1)

THE new year began badly for BBC1 with news that its share of the viewing audience had fallen below 30 percent for the first time ever. Much of this is due to the problems facing controller Peter Salmon outlined in the last issue — the proliferation of new channels and the loss of major sports events on BBC1 — but the figures encouraged especially intense scrutiny of the new BBC1 season unveiled last week.

Does it suggest that Salmon plans to tempt back the missing millions with pap or provide quality alternatives for those loyal viewers who remain? Regrettably at least two of the new 1999 shows gave the impression that the strategy is to do downmarket programming but not very well.

The Vanessa Show — a new morning vehicle for Britain's most prominent Oprah-clone — sees the BBC repeating a recent frequent ITV mistake: buying up one of the opposition's stars and then desperately trying to invent a format for them. Phillip Schofield and Anthea Turner ended up with big contracts but small hits at ITV and Vanessa Feltz seems set to face the same humiliation at the BBC.

In a newspaper publicity interview Vanessa promised a "totally unique format". This phrase is notoriously code in television for little bits stolen from lots of other programmes and tied precariously together... and so it proves again.

At the top there's a bit of the sub-Oprah discussion format which brought Feltz to prominence. A spurious moral dilemma — a woman loves her boyfriend but hates the amount he spends on designer clothes — is stoked up by Vanessa wandering among bussed-in rent-a-gobs with her wand microphone.

This segment is followed by an interview with a startlingly minor celebrity — "Coming up! Davinia Taylor on why she really left *Hollyoakes*!" — and a quiz section (Trash or Treasure) with prizes. It is, as Winston Churchill supposedly said of the MP called either Bossom or Cunis (depending on which account you believe) neither one thing nor the other.

Vanessa's problem is that she lacks the common touch essential for daytime TV. As ITV's rival to the android-like Kilroy on BBC1, she was able to hold her own and her audience-share. But now, thrown against the luscious and friendly Trisha Goddard and the famously touchy-feely Richard and Judy over on ITV, she is getting trashed.

The way she speaks: "Do people not think that designer labels are themselves a kind of uniform?" — usually fails to engage the studio audience. Her stiff attempts to communicate with them most resemble a white MP self-consciously dancing at the Notting Hill carnival.

On-screen confidence was Feltz's greatest asset and it is rapidly seeping away. This is perhaps unsurprising given the increasingly brutal tabloid comments on her weight and looks and the behind-the-scenes panic at the BBC about her initial ratings. Revealingly, as the first fortnight of shows progressed, Vanessa seemed to be appearing in shot less and less, becoming a disembodied voice, as if she were keen to hide or they were keen to hide her. However they spin it, *The Vanessa Show* looks like an expensive mistake.

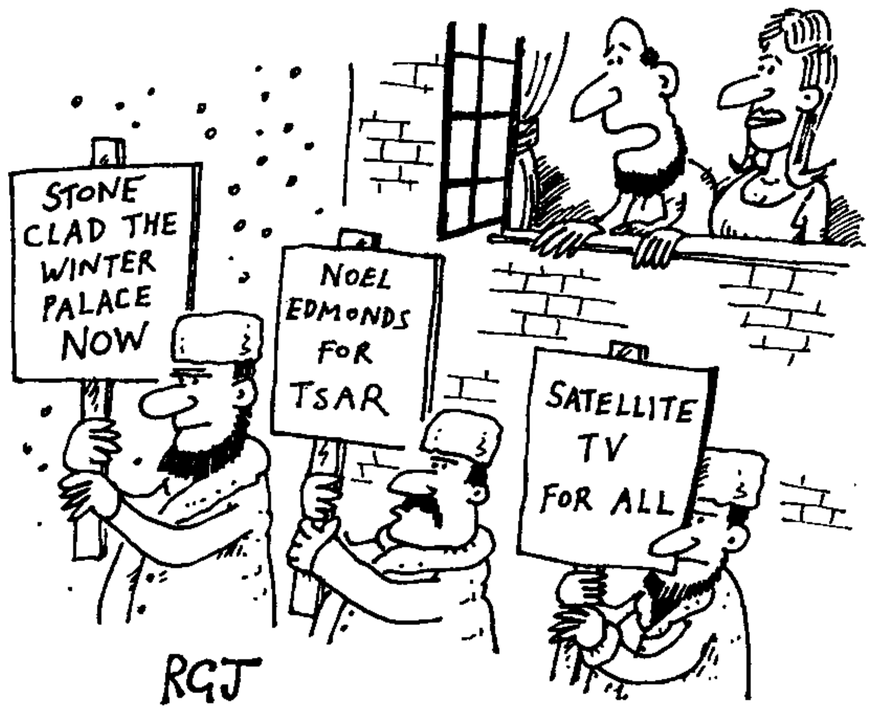
Sunburn — the new weekend drama serial — demonstrates in a different way the perils of trying to copy success from elsewhere. This soap opera about travel reps in Cyprus was cynically commissioned to repeat the success of a docu-soap about package tour hostesses.

Plotlines all too drearily familiar from that series — fussy middle-class English customers, lager louts from Britain on the pull, Mediterranean romeos who promise naive travel reps the earth to get them into bed — are played out again, though lacking the reality which was the one defence of the original.

Holby City — a new Tuesday night medical drama — is the best of the new crop but, worryingly, owes most of its efficiency to the fact that it is a cynical spin-off from an existing BBC drama hit, *Casualty*. Even the supposed unique selling point — that the new show would get away from the high drama of the A&E unit to look at other areas of drama — was compromised by the fact that the opening episode dealt with the most highly dramatic form of surgery: heart transplants, complete with helicopters and literally heart-stopping moments of crisis.

A bad buy-in from ITV; a drama cloned from a docu-soap; and a drama cloned from another drama: it's not a promising start to the year from BBC1.

'Square Eyes'



"Frankly I expected the revolution of the proletariat to be more dramatic"

MEDIA NEWS

ALL the talk about Peter Mandelson standing for mayor of London or being appointed "ambassador to Europe" covers a far more horrifying fact: that Mandy is being openly touted in the home office and elsewhere as the next director-general of the BBC.

His suitability for that office is obvious: he is a close friend and supporter of the present director-general Sir John Birt, and he doesn't need to be elected to get the job. And it is in the gift of Mandy's other close friend, Tony Blair.

JENNY ABRAMSKY, the BBC's director of radio, was quoted in the *Grauniad* this week saying that Radio 4 listeners expect "quality, intelligence and perhaps to be surprised" when they switch on.

People tuning in to the *Today* programme on FM last Friday, for example, were treated to an item on the direction of the Northern Ireland peace process, with contributions from Ulster Unionist MP Ken Maginnis and SDLP deputy leader Seamus Mallon. Or rather with a contribution from Mallon. Maginnis had hardly got going when, to his evident annoyance, he was cut off with an "I'll have to stop you there".

So what item of even greater significance was to come? Er, a *very* long discussion between Clement Freud and Peter York about... the decline of the potato crisp.

THE first communication from the runaway Bramley family caused great excitement when it arrived in newsrooms on 12 January.

The foster couple from Peterborough sent their open letter to national papers and to their local TV stations.

While Anglia and ITV led with the item on their daytime bulletins, the BBC remained strangely silent on the subject until the evening's *Nine O'Clock News*. Indeed, the six o'clock bulletin had already gone out by the time sleepy staff at BBC Norwich bothered to look at what had come in the second post — and found their own copy of the letter sitting in their in-tray.

DECIDING that "viewers have had their fill of offensive television", Scotland's *Daily Record* recently launched "Smutwatch", an occasional why-oh-why column which names and shames the guilty TV shows.

So far the culprits have included the festive editions of *Men Behaving Badly* and Harry Enfield on BBC1, and an ITV documentary on naturism.

One channel that has escaped criticism is L!ve TV, despite its nightly torrent of *Topless Darts*, *Exotic Erotica*, *Orgasmatron* and so forth. Is this because L!ve TV happens to be run by the Mirror Group, which also owns the *Daily Record*? Surely not. A more likely explanation for the lack of complaints is that no one actually watches L!ve TV.

Plugged In

Two busty fans stripped off at a televised football game to cheer up Gazza, a court heard yesterday. Vanessa Richards, 23, and Rachel Sadler, 18, chased Gazza round the pitch live on Sky TV.

The Sun

An occasional column devoted to cross-media plugs masquerading as news.

MOHAMED FAYED's favourite television producer Richard Belfield is keen to build on the success of his last film, *Diana — The Secrets Behind The Crash*.

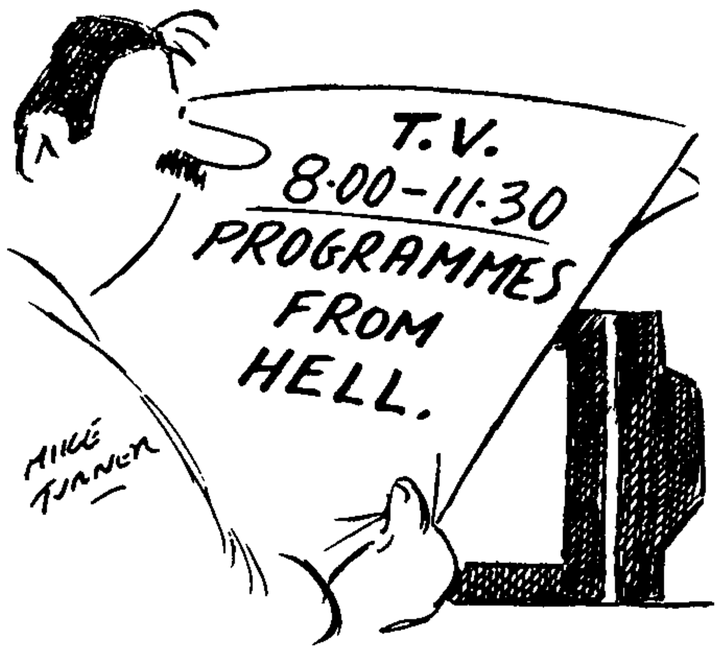
After being introduced by Fayed, Belfield has been talking to former MI6 officer Richard Tomlinson. His latest thesis is a conspiracy linking MI6, Dominic Lawson, the editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*, his wife Rosa Monckton and her 83-year-old father Viscount Monckton, a former major-general who also served in the war office. Of course, this bollocks has nothing to do with Fayed's loathing of Rosa Monckton (for telling the truth about his family's relationships with Diana) and Dominic Lawson for printing accurate attacks on him in the *Sunday Telegraph*. Will we see a programme soon?

Meanwhile for Belfield's latest film — *The Real Mark Thatcher*, commissioned by Channel 4 — his company Fulcrum Productions has adopted a unique approach to the former prime minister's son. Its thesis appears to be that Mark Thatcher is actually a charming, polite, honest family man who never made much money and did not exploit the Thatcher name for commercial gain.

"So many programmes on Mark Thatcher have been negative, predictable and showed little compassion," Fulcrum wrote to an interviewee. "This documentary has been commissioned to cast aside many of these previous assertions."

The Thatcher film was due to be screened on 29 October as part of Channel 4's "biographical series". But when the commissioning editors viewed it they were unhappy.

After a year in the making *The Real Mark Thatcher* is now languishing on the shelf.



"WE CANNOT be cultural imperialists, imposing western notions of decency and openness on countries that have different histories, totally different values and different cultures," said that well-known anti-colonialist non-empire builder Rupert Murdoch at a recent lunch in Singapore hosted by the state-controlled Singapore Boradcasting Authority.

Rupert thrilled his authoritarian minded hosts by slamming the BBC, describing it as "a bunch of people in London who couldn't run a half-hour news segment without a news clip of Tiananmen Square five years after the event". Presumably the bunch of people who run Sky News will remember this when covering future Asian stories (especially those involving Rupert's chums in Beijing).

Sadly Murdoch's respect for Asian values doesn't extend to accepting the jurisdiction of Asian courts. Branded a fugitive from justice by Indian chief metropolitan magistrate R.K. Gauba, the very same Keith Rupert Murdoch is wanted on pornography charges stemming from his control of the satellite service Star TV.

"Expectorate! Expectorate!"

Now the frustrated magistrate has ruled Murdoch to be in contempt of court, declared him "a proclaimed offender" by default and decided the summons can be served through publication of an advertisement in the *New York Times* where Murdoch is believed to be vaguely resident while romancing his Asian babe companion, a high-powered Star TV executive.

STAFF at Yorkshire Television were thrilled to hear their managing director Richard Gregory was among the great and the good appointed to the board of the new Regional Development Agency (RDA) for Yorkshire.

This new government quango has been given £150m to help create jobs and economic prosperity. Presumably not too many Yorkshire employers will follow the example of Gregory's own company, which has halved its workforce over the past decade and is now merely an outpost of Granada, based over the Pennines in Manchester.

BIRTSPEAK

The Overall Broadcast communication Strategy visions a more open and listening environment for Broadcast staff, bringing the Broadcast family closer together through the availability of timely, accurate and relevant data using a number of tools. The Communication Strategy promotes direct face to face communication as the prime management tool for delivering messages. The most significant indirect tool envisioned is the Broadcast Intranet. It is seen as a supporting mechanism to enable ongoing daily activities which will continue to be driven by the more personal delivery of strategic messages via the management structure. Whilst it is a powerful way of delivering and exchanging information across the geographically spread Broadcast organisation, it is not seen as the exclusive tool, nor is it seen as an immediate remedy to the current communication opportunities.

Consequently the Intranet Strategy is one of supportive activity to the fundamental management objectives within the organisation.

— BBC Broadcast Intranet Strategy Statement

LUVVIES

It is easy for celebrities to forget the importance of "giving back"; but if, like me, you get into the swing of charitable works, you soon find yourself addicted to compassion, which is now the essential nutrient of my soul.

MICHAEL BOLTON
Billboard

Submitted by John McFadyen

TAX BREAKDOWNS

PANDEMONIUM at the Inland Revenue as the 31 January deadline approaches by when eight million taxpayers must submit their 1998 tax returns and pay their tax.

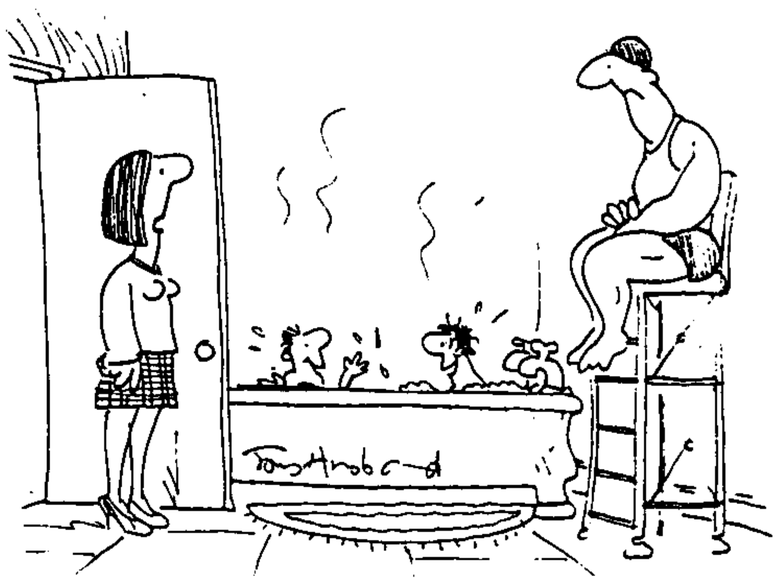
The revenue normally communicates with accountants via an electronic bulletin board. On 5 January this announced that there had been an error with some "statements of account" — the statements telling you how much tax you have paid and how much you owe.

Some of the statements dated 27 December were wrong, apparently, and carried misleading extra entries. The Revenue apologised and promised an explanation in the near future.

The next day the Revenue issued a second message: the first message, this said, was not entirely accurate because not all the electronic copies of these statements of account had been transmitted to accountants yet. Moreover, some of those yet to be transmitted would *still* be wrong.

Rather than prevent the dispatch of incorrect statements, the Revenue decided to speed up transmission while warning accountants that some might receive copies of statements already issued — ie they might get incorrect tax demands not once but twice.

The Revenue has now decided to send an apology — by post — to every taxpayer and his or her adviser, along with guidance on how to interpret the statements of account. In other words, the Revenue is issuing instructions on how to tell whether what it says you owe is right or wrong. The cost of this in postage alone is likely to come to £2m (of taxpayers' money).



"You take the children's bath time too seriously, Norman..."

MUSEUM NEWS

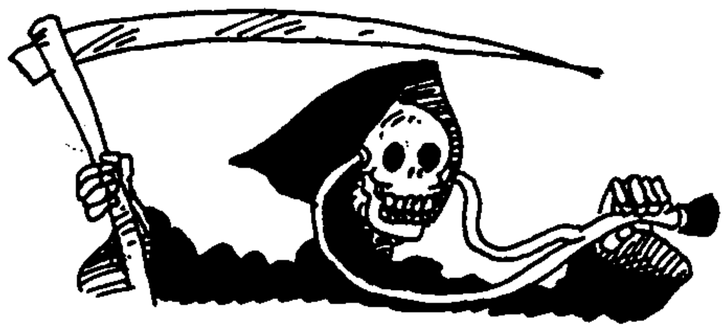
MUCH coming and going at the Natural History Museum, where the big question is: will the regime of Director Neil "And Pray" Chalmers survive until the end of the century?

Much depends on the attitude of the new chairman of the trustees, Sir Ron Oxburgh, rector of Imperial College, who took over from Sir Robert May, the government's chief scientific adviser, at the beginning of the year. Sir Robert, a tough Australian, had no time for Chalmers, yet the director survived his tenure because May had little support from the other trustees — whose members at one time included Guinness scandal jailbird Gerald Ronson.

Sir Ron, however, should he care to investigate the catalogue of fraud, theft and mismanagement at the museum in the last 10 years, may decide that enough is enough. The honest majority among the staff of this once-fine museum have already decided that it is — which is why the *Eye* is kept well-informed about the astonishing level of corruption.

Managers have mounted a mole-hunt since the *Eye* began to report the scandals (see *Eyes* 963 and 964); but then the museum has as many moles as a colander has holes.

Public whistleblowing can be dangerous, however, as Kathleen Maher has disocovered. She is the staff member who first sounded the alarm — but not to the *Eye* — over Stewart Beswick, the deputy head of visitor services who was fired last July over a guide-book scam estimated variously to be worth between £40,000 and £100,000. Ms Maher and two colleagues have had their jobs "terminated".



DOING THE ROUNDS

Bristol Inquiry Update

THE inquiry into child heart surgery deaths at the Bristol Royal Infirmary has not started hearing evidence yet but is already in danger of losing credibility among doctors.

Prof Ian Kennedy, its head, will need much expert help if he is to reach an impartial conclusion. Even supporters of surgeons James Wisheart and Janardan Dhasmana, who were found guilty of professional misconduct (and they have plenty of supporters in Bristol), admit there were major problems in Bristol and that Wisheart was a slow surgeon. This is not always a bad thing: slow can equate with careful.

Wisheart's supporters also admit the results of the unit were "disappointing" for the operations analysed by the General Medical Council (GMC). However, they point out that the analysis referred to only 4 percent of the surgeons' workload, and that if you scrutinise any surgeon's (indeed any doctor's) workload for 80 days, you're bound to find a small area of poor results. By that measure every doctor in the country is incompetent.

It's a clever argument but doesn't detract from the fact that there was clear evidence (first published in the *Eye* on 8 May 1992) that the results for certain complex operations were very poor and the reasons for these failures weren't ascertained or sorted out before the pair continued operating. There was some dispute at the GMC as to how much warning whistleblower Steve Bolsin gave the surgeons to allow them to recognise the problem, but in any case Bolsin shouldn't have felt obliged to do Wisheart's audit for him.

Also disputed and discussed at length at the GMC was who wrote the *Private Eye* articles. This is extraordinary. It's well known in the medical community who M.D. is (it was first revealed in the *British Medical Journal* in 1993), and the GMC could have saved itself a huge amount of time and effort if it had just invited me to the hearing.

AS FOR the official inquiry, most doctors believe it must include a paediatric cardiac surgeon or at least a paediatric cardiologist, and preferably a medical statistician, to have any credibility.

Were the poor results limited to a few complex child heart operations or did they extend to other operations, including adult surgery? Only skilled statistical analysis will say.

Also, heart surgery is a team effort and all members of the team are responsible to varying degrees for auditing the work and acting on the results. To limit the blame to a couple of surgeons and the chief executive is a huge simplification.

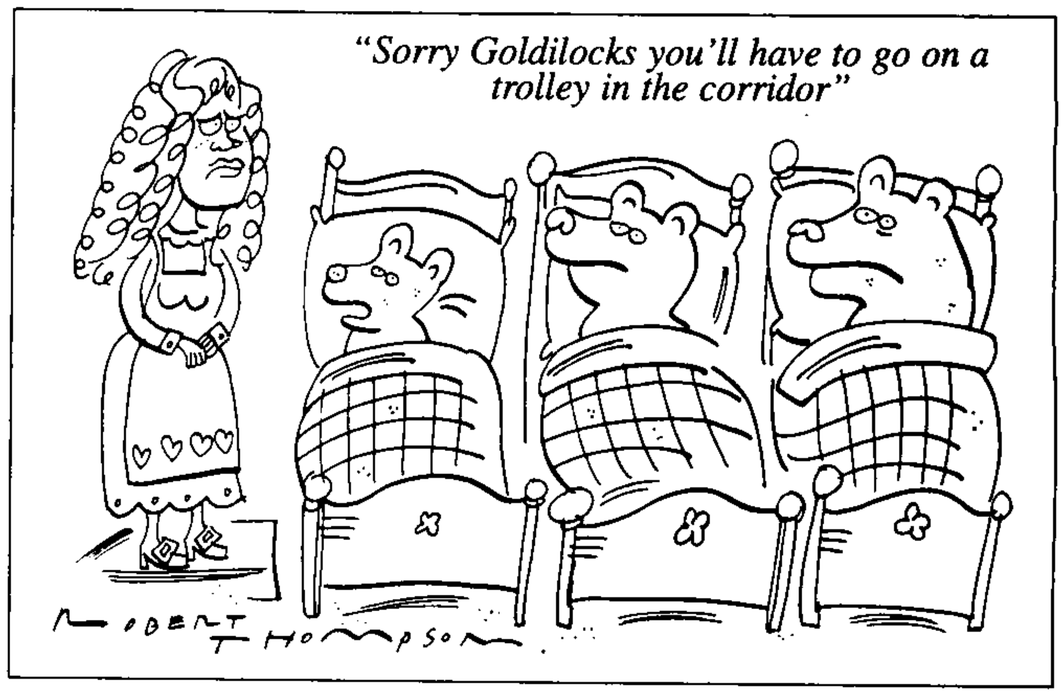
The political context is also important. Why did the department of health encourage Bristol to continue providing the service after a damning unpublished audit back in 1988? And why was Bristol allowed to do paediatric heart surgery in the first place? It had no specialist paediatric heart surgeon and the operating theatre and child intensive care unit were on split sites. Most unsuitable... But was it unique? Or are other heart units lying low at the moment with equally poor results?

Only a specialist in the field can give any true indication of the pressures and conflicts involved. Last year Nick Barnes, a consultant paediatrician from Addenbrooke's Hospital, received a call from the department of health. Could he take a two-year, full-time post as the medical member of the panel of the Bristol inquiry? On 15 September he was formally offered and accepted the job and was asked to attend the first meeting on 22 September. He was told: "The primary purpose of the inquiry is to 'lance the boil' created by these sad events. We have semi-judicial powers but are not a court or a trial and are not involved in any compensation claims, though our findings may be used."

After the meeting he confirmed the terms of his appointment in detail, including the starting date, duration and salary. He was to email a short resumé of his background for distribution to the press and would receive a letter of appointment from the secretary of state. He also agreed to be in Bristol on 26 October to prepare for the public opening on 27 October. But he never made it. On 28 September he had a visit form panel member Una O'Brien. She and Kennedy had decided his inclusion "wouldn't work". They need a doctor with "different experience". What experience? Er, no idea.

Richard Green, inquiry press officer, responded to Barnes' claims in the *BMJ* on 4 January saying: "I regret that Dr Barnes feels misled; in fact he has misled himself. He was never appointed to the inquiry."

This had *BMJ* editor Richard Smith spitting with rage. "This response is insulting, pathetic, and disturbing. It's insulting because it suggests that Dr Barnes, a well respected and senior paediatrician, has `misled himself' and because it comes not from Ian Kennedy (the chairman of the Bristol inquiry) or a senior politician but the press officer. It is pathetic because it is wholly unconvincing and doesn't address at all the central issue of whether a doctor will be included on the inquiry... What will be achieved by a two-year inquiry that may have lost credibility even before it starts?" Clearly Kennedy has his work cut out.



Pay-through-the-nose TV

THE story of the Leeds nurse reprimanded for allowing cancer patients to watch a "free" TV (*Eye* 964) at St James' hospital when they had a perfectly good expensive service provided by Patientline struck a chord in Southampton. Patients at the general hospital there also have to use the Patientline TV and phone system paid for by smart cards at £5 a time.

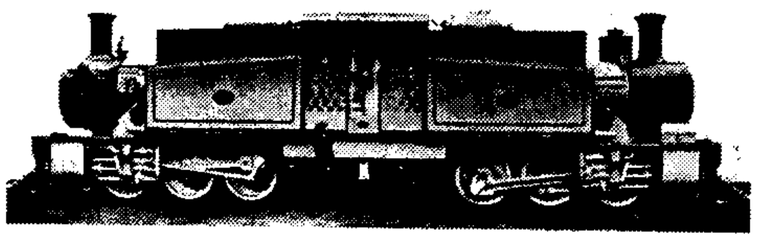
"As well as patients being obliged to fork out several pounds a day to watch TV, Patientline charges exorbitant amounts for patients' phone calls and for incoming calls from relatives and friends," complains one local *Eye* reader. Having started out at Northwick Park Hospital in Harrow, Patientline is being welcomed by an increasing number of hospitals. As well as St James' and Southampton General, it operates at the Queens Medical Centre (Nottingham), the Royal Oldham Hospital and has plans to expand into another 20 hospitals.

For founder Colin Alton and other directors Patientline is virtually a licence to print money. According to its latest accounts, it made a gross profit of £357,000 on a turnover of £439,000 in 1996-7 — and that was before expansion. The posters and stickers all over Southampton General exhorting visitors to give patients "the present they really want" — ie credit on the Patientline terminal — is enough to make anyone ill.

M.D.

We also promised that we would modernise our health service. So we are investing an additional £18 for health services for local people. An excellent 50th birthday present for the NHS!

Newsletter from David Taylor MP



SIGNAL FAILURES

Focus on GNE*Aargh!*

FINGERS are still crossed at GNER (spelt "GNEAh" in recent ads) that the government will ignore the company's track record and extend its seven-year franchise on the London to Edinburgh line.

Despite having the most modern mainline in Britain (upgraded in 1991) GNER has consistently missed even the soft passenger's charter targets for annual average punctuality. The latest report showed that GNER received the second largest number of complaints, after Virgin; but the association of train operating companies (whose board includes GNER chief executive Christopher Garnett) insisted complaints had increased because "the new customer-driven railway is encouraging more comments and suggestions and responding positively to them".

GNER was held up as a shining example of a company that hands out compensation claim forms on seriously delayed trains (although no mention was made that GNER views such forms as a useful way to gather addresses for junk-mail purposes).

One *Eye* reader who commutes between Durham and York gives an insight into what really happens when a passenger complains to GNER. Fewer than half the 31 GNER trains he used during October arrived no more than five minutes late. His 50-minute journey was delayed more than 90 minutes three times and once by 155 minutes, partly because GNER locomotives caught fire twice in as many weeks. He felt entitled to a refund on his £206 monthly season ticket.

GNER's exemplary complaints service swung into action after only six weeks of unexplained delay and just one reminder from the complainer. "We at GNER cannot, in all fairness, prevent delays to our services caused by Railtrack," wrote Christopher Wright of GNER customer relations, before admitting GNER was responsible for reliability of its "trainsets". He added: "I would advise that our equipment is man-made and mostly manufactured by outside industry. It will, as with any other technology, be prone to human error in manufacture and maintenance." He concluded no refund would be paid as the 12-month average punctuality figures had not been officially published. (They will register arrivals at London and other termini, not punctuality in the York area.)

Other passengers may also feel cheated. In January 1997 GNER and its parent company, Sea Containers, hyped an imminent order for two tilting express trains, to be delivered within two years, and plans to convert 45 sleeping carriages into extra rolling stock for day-time trains. Two years later the converted carriages have yet to appear and the tilting trains, now due, have not even been ordered.

GNER's failure this time is due to a man-made franchise bid by a rival company. Sea Containers had high hopes of securing the 15-year west coast franchise — involving a big fleet of tilting trains to which the GNER pair would be a cost-effective addition — but Virgin severely undercut Sea Containers. From being prepared to buy the new trains "even if we are compelled to stick with seven years", Sea Containers changed tack, threatening not to order them unless the government met its demand for a 15-year GNER franchise.

Arguing for an extension must surely be a waste of GNER's time, even though the government has invited proposals from train companies. Sea Containers' last annual report describes its involvement with Burma's tourist industry, and it is official UK government policy not to encourage trade with Burma because of its human rights record. A Labour government would never award a franchise to a company with such connections. Or would it?

'Dr B. Ching'

Down on the Fish Farm

DESPITE the discovery last month of a cancer-causing virus in Atlantic farm salmon, Scottish office fishery scientists have not so far made any comment on whether salmon swimbladder sarcoma virus (SSSV) has been found in Scottish fish farms.

SSSV was discovered by biologists at Cornell University in the US. While it is not thought to pose a hazard to humans, researchers believe it could devastate wild Atlantic salmon populations, now at their lowest ever recorded level.

For their part, Scottish fish farms are currently reeling from the impact of another salmon killer disease, infectious salmon anaemia (ISA), which has quarantined 70 percent of the industry and was almost certainly introduced into Scotland's marine environment by infected breeding stock from Norway.

ISA and SSSV have one thing in common: government fishery scientists on either side of the Atlantic claim neither is a threat to human health. Their decision means fish farmers can continue to harvest and sell "sick" fish to the public. Would the public buy them if they knew these salmon had come from farms where fish had been proven to carry live ISA virus particles either on or in their tissues, or possibly tumour promoting SSSV growths?

A cancer with similar symptoms to SSSV was reported in Scottish farm salmon in 1978, before modern genetic testing methods were available. At the time Scottish fishery scientists reported seeing "virus-like particles" during microscopic examination of salmon tumours. However, the result of these and any subsequent investigations which many or may not have been carried out have never been made public.

The SSSV virus causes a slow-growing cancer that can take up to two years to produce a noticeable tumour on salmon swimbladders. By the time the tumour is detectable, from a bulging in the side of fish, the salmon are near death. James W. Cassey, professor of veterinary microbiology and immunology at Cornell, said: "As natural habitats decline and investigators more intensively monitor aquatic animal health, additional tumours like these will be found."

POLICE 5

MERSEYSIDE's new chief constable Norman Bettison is aghast at BBC2's five-part fly-on-the-wall documentary *Mersey Blues*. Made before his appointment, it exposes the low morale and incompetence within his force and hints at the staggering level of corruption.

In the first instalment a suspected heroin courier stopped on the motorway was found to be "clean" — much to drug squad officers' astonishment. Who could have tipped him off? Viewers, alas, were not told.

There are plenty of other things viewers will *not* be seeing or hearing — not least the story about the Merseyside detective sergeant who, accompanied by a woman detective constable, attended an identity parade to identify a suspect for an horrific assault on two Asians at an Indian take-away.

The parade was cancelled (the interpreter didn't turn up) and the two officers escorted the suspect home. On the way the sergeant expressed some outspoken views about Asians in Britain, and advised the suspect that the assailant in the restaurant would have been better advised to have used a baseball bat.

When the woman detective protested about his language the sergeant gave vent to his opinion about women police officers — an opinion which was far from civilised or friendly. The *Eye* asked Merseyside police about this matter and got the following reply: "All I can say is that we have received a complaint from two serving officers regarding racist and sexist remarks and the complaints are currently being investigated. We are unable to comment further." The spokesman asked the *Eye* not to name the sergeant at least until after the investigation is complete.

Nor will *Mersey Blues* viewers be seeing the closed-circuit television footage which, Rodney King-style, captured the beating of football fan Anthony Valerio by Merseyside police in March last year after an Everton match against Aston Villa. The city centre camera — intended to protect the public from un-uniformed thugs — clearly shows Valerio, 37, who had shouted at officers but not offered any violence, being hit around the legs with a long-handled baton and then, apparently, being kicked by a policeman while lying on the ground.

Police brought charges of affray against Valerio and withheld the video until his solicitor, Rex Makin, obtained a court order for its release in December. One look persuaded magistrates to throw out the charges against Valerio, who is now pursuing a claim for substantial damages against Merseyside constabulary. More than nine months after the incident, two officers have been belatedly suspended pending investigations by the Police Complaints Authority (PCA).

Just before Christmas Liverpudlians had a chuckle over PC Chris Adeniran, who took the edge off the force's anti drinking and driving campaign by being arrested twice in one day on suspicion of drinking and driving. After an initial court appearance colleagues let him use a side entrance to avoid press photographers — one normally reserved for court officials and on-duty police, not defendants. Adeniran is due in court again on 26 January.

> A long-serving police chief who lies in Lichfield has been jailed for two years after admitting a £26,000 fraud.
>
> *Lichfield Mercury*

SNARESBROOK crown court in east London recently heard the case of Tommy "The Boxer" Mullen, who was contesting a confiscation order by the Metropolitan police.

Mullen, who is serving an 18-year sentence for drug dealing, argued that he was unable to hand over the £1m in traceable assets the crown demanded — the remains of the £9m he is believed to have made from heroin dealing — because the Provisional IRA was claiming first dibs on it as protection money owed to it from his days doing business in Northern Ireland.

Mullen's argument was that the IRA doesn't have a very good track record in dealing sympathetically with those who owe it money. Belfast cannabis dealer Brendan "Bap" Campbell explained to a court last year how he had defaulted on payments, but was shot when out on bail; and in November Manny O'Campbell, who dealt in cocaine and had contributed large amounts to IRA funds, was ritually executed by gunmen in Glasgow.

Judge Timothy King was not impressed, however, and not only ruled that the money must be given up to the crown, but that Mullen would face an additional six years inside should he fail to cooperate in retrieving the cash.

None of this really fits with the claim that the IRA has now gone legit and moved into selling "sniper of the month" calendars to raise funds rather than collecting protection money from drug dealers. It seems somewhat odd that one crown agency (the Northern Ireland office) will assure us that such activities no longer go on, even as another (the CPS) is amassing evidence that they still very definitely do.

Number crunchings

160,000

■ Number of legally held weapons surrendered after firearms amendment act

0

■ Number of illegally held weapons surrendered after Northern Ireland peace agreement

Pseuds Corner

Mental Fight

An anti-spell for the 21st century

Time to be real

1

An illusion by which we can become
More real.
A moment unremarked by the universe,
By nature, the seasons, or stars.
Moment we have marked out
In timelessness.
Human moment.
Making a ritual, a drama, a tear
On eternity.
Domesticating the infinite.
Contemplating the quantum
questions:
Time, death, new beginnings,
Regeneration, cycles, the unknown...

6

Everyone loves a spring cleaning.
Let's have a humanity cleaning.
Open up history's chamber of horrors
And clear out the skeletons behind the mirrors,
Put our breeding nightmares to flight
Transform our monsters with our light.
Clear out the stables
In our celebrated fables
A giant cleaning
Is no mean undertaking.

Signs from the old times

2

What will we choose?
Will we allow ourselves descend
Into universal chaos and darkness
A world without hope, without fastness
Without moorings, without light
Without possibility for mental fight,
A world breeding mass murderers
Energy vultures, serial killers
With minds spinning in anomie and amorality
With murder, rape and genocide as normality?...

4

... We are the best positioned farmers
Of new time.
We are in a precious moment
In time's ovulation.
We are now at that rare intersection
That magic favours
That history adores
That legend has no need to embellish
Because it is already a legendary moment
In its own wonderful right.

5

... We are living in an enchanted time.
With our spirits right
We can enchant the future.
With our love's might
We can give a truer meaning to our past.

Selections from a "millennium poem"
by BEN OKRI
The Times

CONTRIBUTOR: Gnome.

£10 paid for entries

Letters

Lookalike

Sophie

Jill

Sir,

Has anyone noticed the startling resemblance between Jill Dando, the blonde-haired woman in the news, and Sophie Rhys-Jones, the blonde-haired woman in the news? As far as I know, they have never been seen together. Is the royal family concealing something from us? I think we should be told.

Yours etc,
E. DUTTON,
New Malden, Surrey.

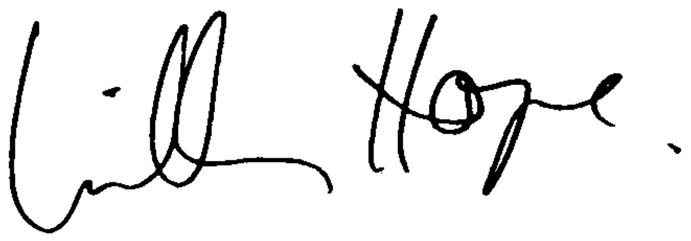
No hoper

Sir,

Whenever I see William Hague's signature, I can't help thinking he has written "little hope". Example enclosed.

Yours faithfully,

Name and address withheld.



Tartan terror

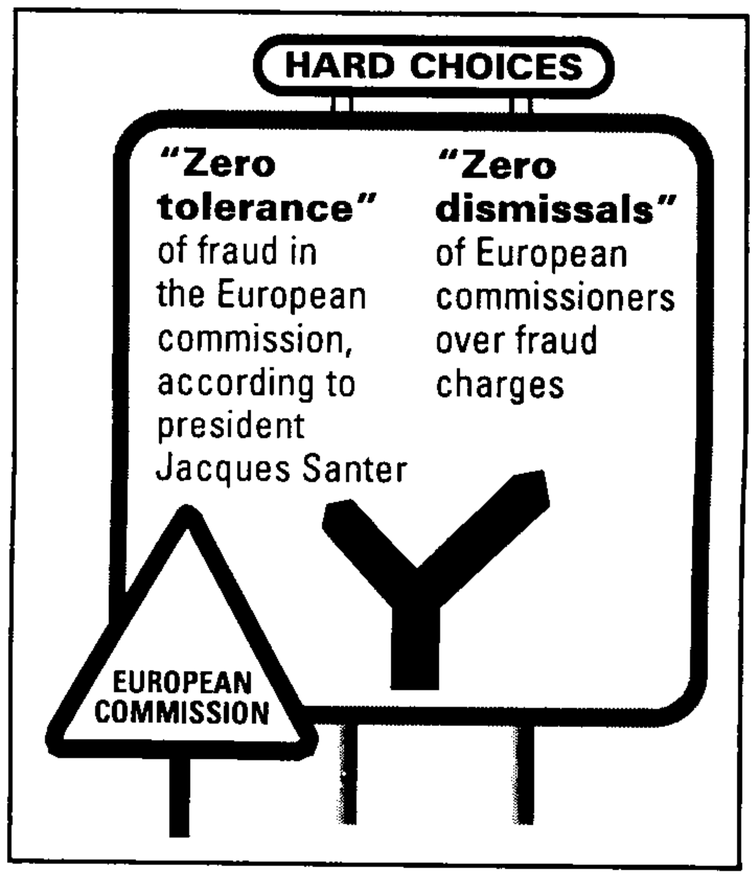
Sir,

Re: Alastair Campbell. Stop being so beastly to the press secretary to the Rev Blair.

According to my copy of Clans & Tartans (Parragon, ISBN 0-7525-1672-8), Clan Campbell, Motto: Ne Obliviscaris (Forget Not), get their name from the translation of the Gaelic "cam buel" which means "crooked mouth".

Alastair is just following his destiny.

Yours faithfully,
PAUL PHILLIPS,
Pontypridd.


HARD CHOICES
"Zero tolerance" of fraud in the European commission, according to president Jacques Santer
"Zero dismissals" of European commissioners over fraud charges
EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Piloti wail

Sir,

Before writing his articles, Piloti really ought to spend some time living in the city that he's talking about. Alternatively, he should make sure that his local sources are a little more accurate and a little less tired and emotional (EYE 967's local source in Glasgow must have been tired and emotional if he seriously thinks that Sir Leslie Martin's pisspoor Royal Concert Hall is a better building than the Buchanan Galleries).

Contrary to the eighth paragraph of Nooks & Corners, not a single oriel, nor indeed any part of the Buchanan Galleries, is in "Renfrew Street". Substituting the name "Killermont Street" would have rendered this paragraph completely accurate. As it is, Glaswegians can dish out to Piloti's ramblings the same kind of contempt that the BBC in London have for BBC Scotland (but that's another story...)

Yours sincerely,
CHRIS NICKOL,
New Kilpatrick Parish Church.

Overspilling: the beans

Sir,

I am writing to correct factual inaccuracies contained within the article about our overspill estate disposal programme. We do have a strategy to dispose of our overspill estates, as they no longer represent a rehousing resource for the city council.

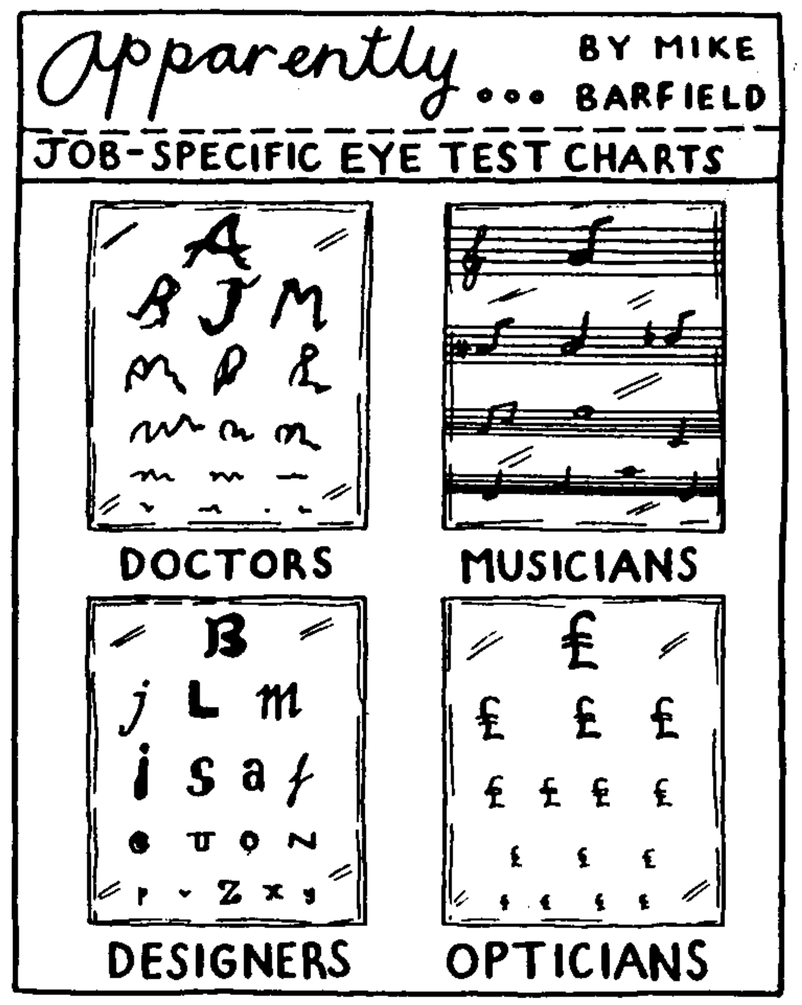
It is inaccurate to state that they are "crime-ridden communities" and, indeed, this statement is offensive to the thousands of decent, law abiding people who live in those houses. The reference to the Moors Murderers is designed to unnecessarily denigrate the estate and draw associations in your readers' minds, which are at best journalistically lazy and at worst positively damaging for the community on Hattersley.

*It is factually incorrect that tenants on an overspill estate recently voted to stay in council control. In **every** ballot which Manchester city council has held, the tenants have voted overwhelmingly in favour of transferring to another social landlord. It is also factually inaccurate that we are "deliberately running the estates down" and we have no plans whatsoever to sell on any sites to developers on these estates. All land is transferred to a registered social landlord and we have no interest whatsoever in developing any new houses outside the boundaries of the city.*

Yours sincerely,
COUNCILLOR CLAIRE NANGLE,
Chair, Housing and Environmental Services Committee, Manchester Housing.

In the immediate term, we feel the court, not us, should determine whether Jade and Hannah live whilst any adoption application is considered."

The Times



Porton lemon

Sir,

*Re: Porton Downer. That smug **** from the DERA is pulling a fast one. I was up at Porton Down just before Christmas, but at the CAMR (please find enclosed bumph) — which is where the vaccines et al are developed. The DERA is just down the road, within the same wired-off area, beyond the yellow "Public prohibited beyond this point" signs. "Porton Down" is not just "Porton Down", if you get my drift.*

Yours,
Name and address withheld.

Read my tips

Sir,

On behalf of the Virgin employee skinflints (Bookworm, EYE 967). Having taken the time to put myself in the privileged position of actually having read Mr Branson's autobiography, so generously presented to us, I can safely say my particular copy will be finding its way on to the shelf of a local bookshop at the first available opportunity. I shall, for my efforts, be twenty pounds the richer. In the meantime, I think I will get stuck into some more entertaining literature. The telephone directory is a possibility.

Yours,
VIRGIN CINEMA EMPLOYEE,
Brighton.

On his loan-some?

Sir,

While reading through one of my festive gifts, a book of world proverbs, I happened to notice the following Greek words of wisdom: "To lose a friend, make him a loan."

Yours,
MARTIN MACARI,
Edinburgh.

CAP fits

Sir,

If the right to publish magazines were rationed, would we see Lord Gnome bidding for quota in order to keep his readers satisfied? But the very notion is absurd!

Almost as absurd, in fact, as telling a country which might have been designed with the express purpose of supporting dairy cattle that it can only produce 85 percent of its domestic milk requirement. Gumboot is right to rail against this insane situation, but he should put the blame for it squarely where it belongs — the common agricultural policy (CAP) of the European Union.

Yours faithfully,
JOSEPH B. FOX,
Redhill, Surrey.

I-SPY

***Portsmouth** (Walter Harris)*

***Hampstead** (K.F. Hoad)*

***Ilfracombe** (Barbara Payne)*

£10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

How many neuros to the £

Sir,

Re: Chris Adams, Neurosurgeon, EYE 966 and 967. Mr Adams appears to be better at neurosurgery than at mathematics. £1m per annum, allowing a modest working year of 200 days, amounts to £5,000 per day. A fee of £32,000 is therefore appropriate to more than six whole days' work. We know that he spent an afternoon in court, and possibly the morning waiting around. Did he really spend more than five whole days studying the evidence, conferring with counsel and preparing his report?

In fact, of course, an eminent surgeon at the peak of his career is much more likely to have a working year of 250 days — only £4,000 a day, which implies eight whole days for one legal case. If Mr Adams is as slow in making up his mind as that I hope that I never become one of his patients.

Yours faithfully,
PETER JAY,
London W9.

Lookalike

Angel

Gaynor

Sir,

A few months ago one of your readers claimed to see a likeness between the second Mrs Cook and a portrait by Modigliani. Am I alone in thinking that there is a much closer resemblance with one of the Angels on the Wilton Diptych? What is more, the portrait reflects the saintly fashion in which Gaynor rescued Robin from a loveless 28-year marriage to a grim Scotch termagant.

Yours sincerely,
RICHARD MOWBRAY,
London.

Child labour

Sir,

In EYE 967 L. Hepworth drew my attention to the BBC's use of a young child to advertise a variety of children's programmes. No doubt, the BBC has a right, some would say a duty, to advertise. The child seemed to enjoy the experience.

However, on Tuesday 5 January the same small child was to be seen in BBC2's GREAT RAILWAY JOURNEYS: CALCUTTA TO RAJASTAN. The young boy was shown wandering alone in Calcutta, talking to strangers, drinking what appeared to be alcohol with an elderly colonial gentleman and sharing a sleeper carriage with a heavily bearded former-mystic. He even posed for photographs at the Taj Mahal. The boy appeared to be cheerful, but surely the BBC was taking a grave risk by allowing a small child to make such a journey in India, apparently alone?

Has the child safely returned from his Great Railway Journey? We should be told.

Yours faithfully,
MIKE PEARSON,
Via e-mail.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"They (Leeds) used to be a bit like Arsenal, winning by one goal to nil — or even less."
NASSER HUSSAIN, Channel 5
(Anna Lomax)

"So, this movie you star in, The Life Story of George Best, *tell us what it's about."*
GEORGE GAVIN, Sky Sports
(Michael Carlson)

"Luckily he made amends by going on to score a subliminal goal ten minutes before the end."
Radio Humberside
(Steve Meek)

"What's needed at the FA now is a diplomatic dictator."
DAVID PLEAT, Radio 5 Live
(A.S. Cooper)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE THE RIGHT KIND OF BUSINESS.
I'LL SHOW YOU HOW TO RECOGNISE A CHEAP GET-RICH-QUICK SCHEME..
.. AND HOW TO SET IT UP.

BRUSSELS SPOUTS

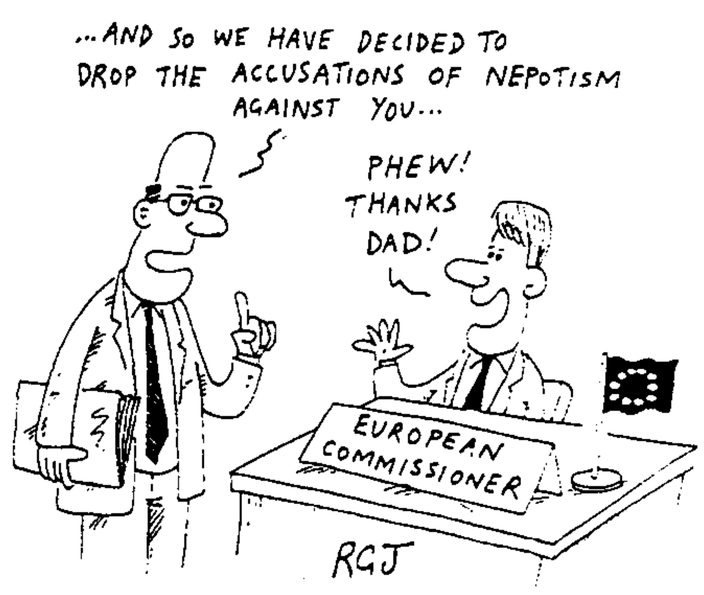
OUR shameful Eurocrats narrowly risked being tossed from the gravy train last week after MEPs, fed up with the yearly loss of at least £6bn in European Union (EU) fraud, just missed passing a vote of no confidence in them by 293 to 232.

In fact EU commissioners have deliberately ignored financial regulations, first drawn up in 1977, which make their financial controller liable to disclose to other commissioners any failure to recover debts and to publicly name the director-general responsible.

The current financial controller Isabella Ventura is director-general of the EU's financial sector DG XX. She appears to have followed Eurocratic tradition in ignoring the regulations, even though the latest internal report on the matter was distributed in her name to the college of commissioners nearly two years ago.

Oddly this report is not visible among the EU's 23,326 documents relating to finance, even though it highlighted territoriality and lack of cooperation of Eurocratic heads with the pitifully inadequate EU fraud squad (UCLAP); the inability of commissioners to control finance due to the enormity of the programmes; the lack of personnel to verify expenditure; and the huge reluctance within the commission itself to accept responsibility for their actions.

When the hapless Paul Van Buitenen, from the EU watchdog's court of auditors, took matters into his own hands and told members of the European parliament that their own commissioners had blocked inquiries into EU fraud, Ventura's reaction on behalf



of the finance sector was to ask the personnel department to suspend him on half pay.

Poor Van Buitenen, who apparently received death threats, then found himself stigmatised by the MEPs themselves when they voted against telling the commission to reinstate him by 286 to 238. In his haste to impart sensitive information following the threats to his life, Van Buitenen had failed to follow the correct procedure of informing the president of the parliament of his allegations instead of the head of one of its political parties, thereby allegedly jeopardising existing fraud investigations.

This is a sorry state of affairs given that seven years ago the status of the court of auditors was elevated to that of an institution (*Eye* 793) after trillions of ecus had disappeared. This should have signalled a new era of cooperation between MEPs and auditors. Sadly, a year later the auditors concluded: "In the court's opinion the essential elements of a reliable system are unlikely to be put in place either in the foreseeable future or at reasonable cost."

In spite of the commission's inertia in matters of fraud, Ventura's second in command, Francesco de Angelis, tried to introduce a controversial legal document outlining plans for a European public prosecutor to solve such matters. Fears that this would encroach on British judicial rights of *habeas corpus* and trial by jury were strengthened last December when an inter-parliamentary conference with commission president Jacques Santer resolved that a qualified majority vote on the subject would be taken which would ignore the British veto. The document is currently being scrutinised in the House of Lords.

Ironically the UK is perhaps the only country in the EU which could have offered Van Buitenen legal protection and even rewarded him for his whistleblowing actions under the public interest disclosure bill of 2 July 1998.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● **"Isaac may be dead but he is still the best man for me," eighty-year-old Zibi Masanabo informed the congregation at her wedding at a church in Vaalbank, east of Pretoria, South Africa. "We lived together since 1940, and I bore him seven children, but we never got married because he could never afford the dowry. By the time he died in 1973, he had still only**

paid my family ten of the twelve cows and half of the twenty packets of salted peanuts that had been agreed for my hand in marriage. But my mother recently passed on, and there is no one to stop me marrying Isaac now. It is sad that he has been dead for twenty-five years, but life is never perfect."

Zibi Masanabo duly married an urn containing the ashes of Isaac Masanabo. *(The Star [Malaysia], 26/10/98. Spotter: Peter Meech)*

—●—

● "Mr Otoma has no one to blame but himself," Takashi Nomura told reporters gathered in his Tike-Take bar in Tokyo. "This accident would never have happened if he had not drunk fifteen bottles of hydrogen beer, in order to maximise the size of the flames he could belch during the contest."

Nomura and the Asaka Beer Corporation stand accused by Toshira Otama of selling toxic substances, and are being sued for causing grievous bodily harm. "Our Suiso brand of beer is a big hit with customers," Nomura explained. "The carbon dioxide normally used to add fizz has been replaced by environmentally-friendly hydrogen gas. It's very popular in karaoke bars, because the hydrogen gas is lighter than air, and gives the drinker an unnaturally high soprano type voice, like a Geisha. The gas is also flammable, and some singers hold cigarette lighters near their mouths, so they can belch in between verses and shoot blue flames across the bar. It's what we in Japan call 'performing the warbling dragon'. It's a very beautiful effect in a darkened room. Our 'Flaming Karaoke' contest simply combined these popular trends.

"Unfortunately, Mr Otama became drunk and disorderly during the early stages of the contest, with disastrous results. True, he catapulted balls of fire across the room that Gojira would be proud of, but this was not enough to win him first prize, because the judgement is made on the quality of the flames and that of the singing, and after fifteen bottles of lager he was badly out of tune. Sadly, he took exception to the result, became abusive, and began belching blue fireballs at the judge. He set alight Mrs Mifune's hair, and entirely removed her eyebrows, lashes and paper earring in the process. He also scorched the clothing of two nearby customers, neither of whom has ever returned to my bar again. My security guards were left with no choice but to hurl themselves at Mr Otama's knees, knocking his legs from under him and causing him to swallow a lighted cigarette.

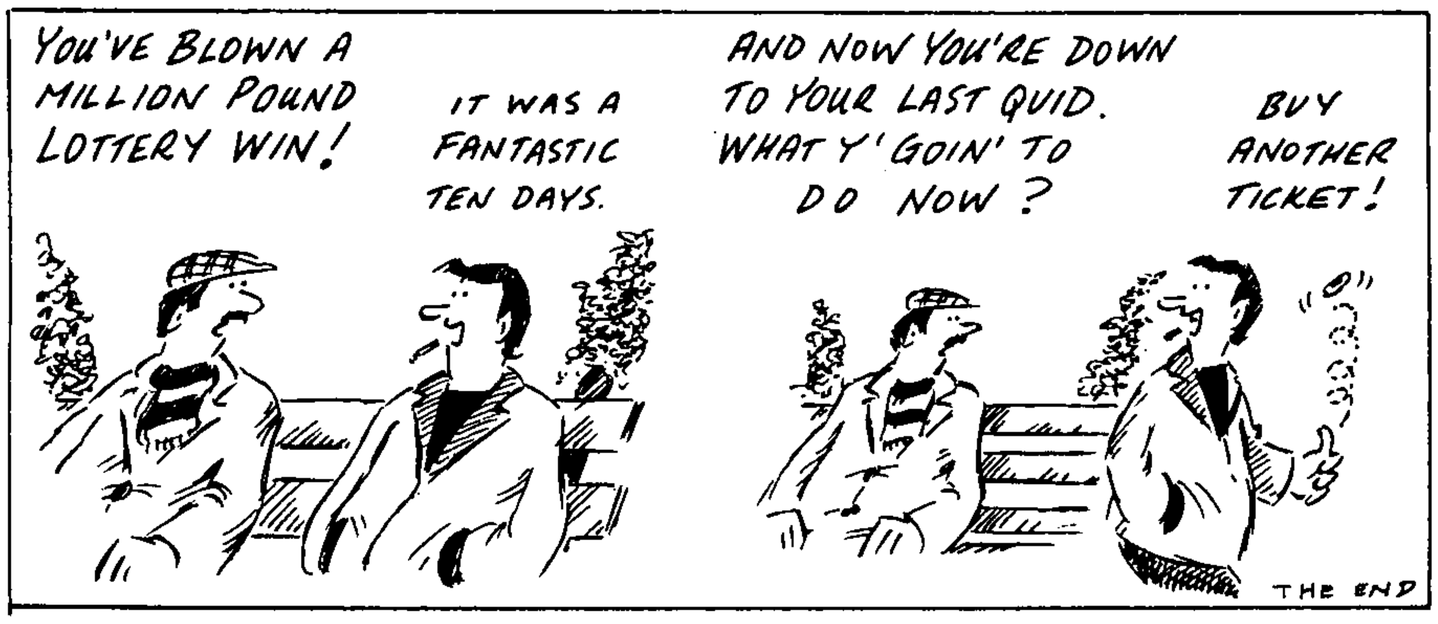
"The Tike-Take bar takes no responsibility for the subsequent internal combustion and burns to Mr Otama's oesophagus, larynx, and sinuses, as the burning hydrogen gases forced their way out of his body." *(Associated Press, 10/12/98. Spotter: Ray the Welshman Abroad)*

—●—

● *"Although the standard of performance among all thirty-five contestants was unusually high, Manop Tummuangkhon is the unanimous choice of the judges," said an official as he announced the winner of the Nakhon Ratchasima Canine Copycat contest, held in Northern Thailand to publicise an anti-Rabies campaign. "His ability to mimic man's best friend in all his moods was quite astonishing. The judges were particularly impressed by his displays of belligerence and amorousness, and his 'barking at strangers' and 'playing dead' were highly commended. But it is for his 'howling at the moon' and his highly original 'rubbing against a leg' and 'urinating on a lamp post' that he will be best remembered."* (Gulf Today, 25/10/98. Spotter: Ian Philliskirk)

The Lottery Winners

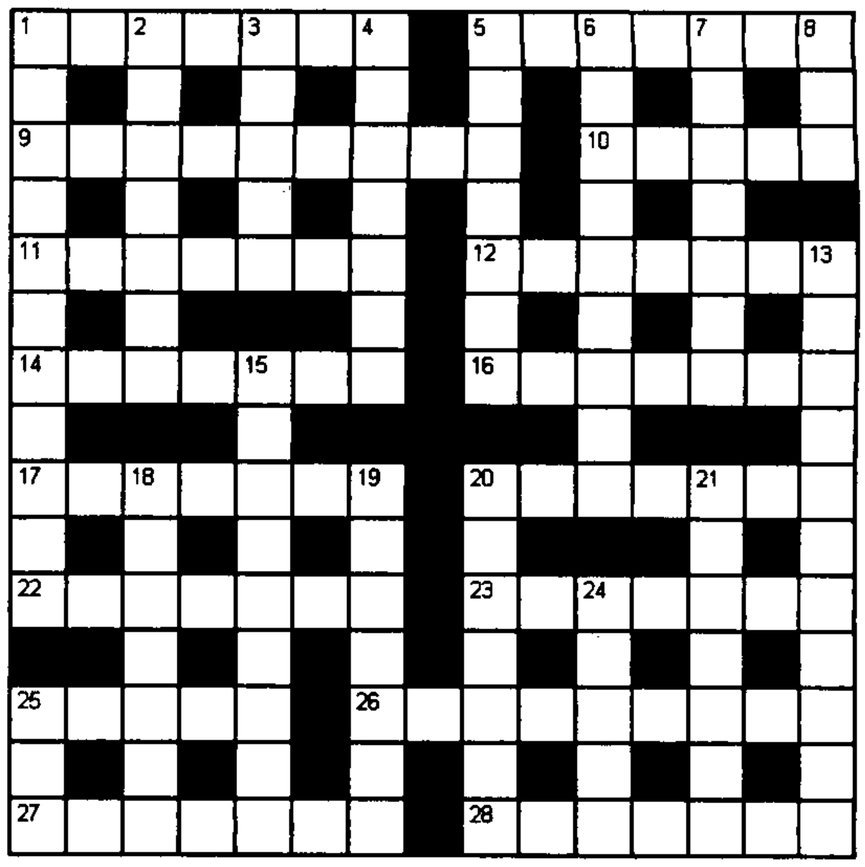
TURNER


YOU'VE BLOWN A MILLION POUND LOTTERY WIN!
IT WAS A FANTASTIC TEN DAYS.
AND NOW YOU'RE DOWN TO YOUR LAST QUID. WHAT Y'GOIN' TO DO NOW?
BUY ANOTHER TICKET!
THE END

EYE CROSSWORD 123

by Cyclops

£100 prize



ACROSS

1 Mowlam's personal introduction right next to vice-President's base (7)
5 (see 27)
9 Teasing, bonking and merriment (6,3)
10 As Fergie might say, "Yes, ducks, a real oik" (5)
11 Sherry's lover (7)
12 Bill's opener: "Everything's been discovered – a right fiasco" (5-2)
14/25dn Character-assassin's chopper coupling with Guy (7-3)
16 The police's not entirely biggest apology ... (7)
17 ... insincere talk, look, to dispose of dirty linen (7)
20 The *Eye*'s lowdown on politicians' food cover up (2,5)
22 Disgraced Ron sat on Mandelson's first cross-bar (7)
23 Married and screwed Glenda – messed up (7)
25 "Arse about ...": start of Blair's abandoned slogan (5)
26 Mandelson on quitting gets involved with first class Romeo (6,3)
27/5 Unclear lists on raw processed food, causing awful conflict (7,7)
28 Does a Mandelson and sticks up two fingers again? (7)

DOWN

1/13 I'm President: every instance of head from Monica and other kinds of goings-on (about ten, roughly) led to these (11,11)
2 Get laid – be discerning! (4,3)
3 Starr Report started one wanting Clinton finally to resign (5)
4 What Mandelson wanted for New Labour and how he feels now? (4,3)
5 Rambler takes turn with slut (7)
6 Tory ass screwed up hosting fifty-one St John Stevas types (9)
7 A pub on the continent, the cause of slurred speech (7)
8 Self-importance in negotiations (3)
13 (see 1dn)
15 Monument to a deceased Mick Jagger? (9)
18 Nigel, a stickler quite able to endure a stretch inside (7)
19 Secret police chief, that bloke Mel screwed, right? (7)
20 Hour roughly holding Monica's head I'd used as a cigar receptacle (7)
21 Sad, glum guy, awful kisser (4,3)
24 Desires and, it's said, gets hands on some dough (5)
25 (see 14)

£100 prize to first solution opened on 29.1.99. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG.

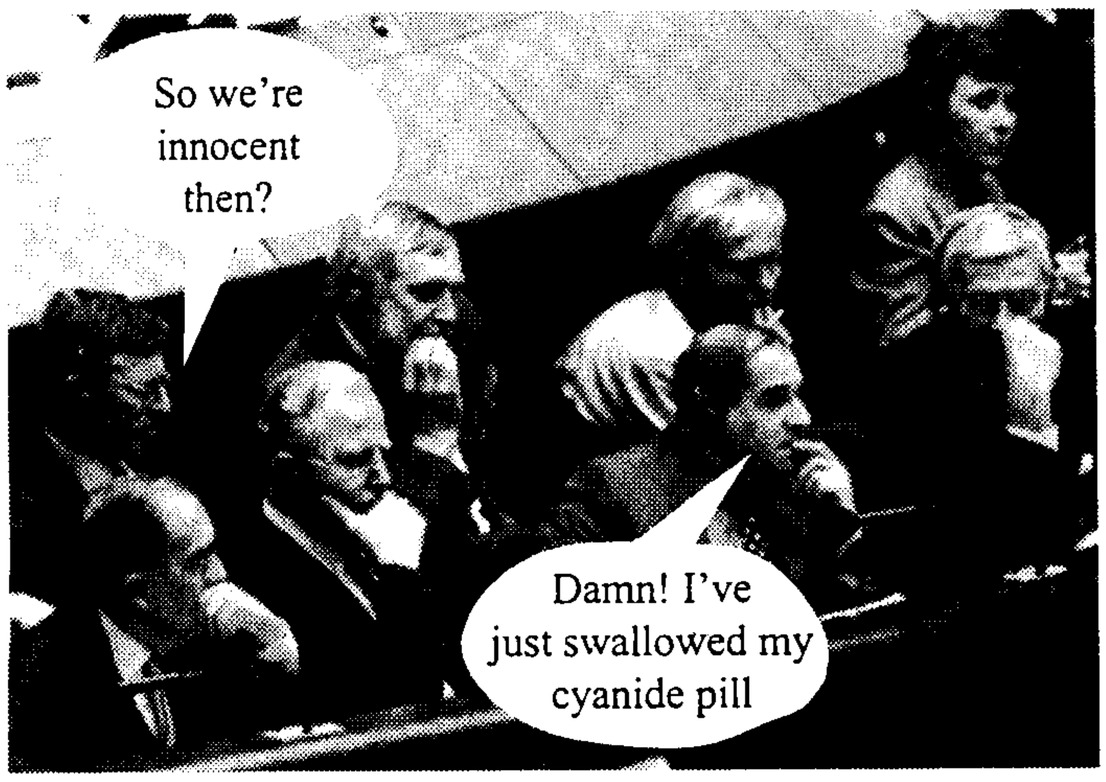
Solution to Crossword No. 122

Winner: ROBERT THORPE

ACROSS: 1/24ac/12/15 Jack and the Beanstalk 3 Idle gossip 9 Neutral 11 (see 17) 12 (see 1 ac.) 13 (see 28) 14 Rebirth 16 Sabrina 18 Aladdin 20 Gobbler 22 Puss in Boots 24 (see 1 ac.) 25 Amateur 26 Pensive 27 Takes cover 28/13 Dick Whittington.

DOWN: 1 Janitor 2 Crude 4 Doltish 5 Estates 6 Ocean 7 Show trial 8 Pudenda 10 Rewired 15 (see 1 ac.) 17/11 Babes in the Wood 18 Asphalt 19 Nabarro 20 Groupie 21 Redneck 23 Ideas 24 Alibi.

EUREMBERG TRIAL COLLAPSES
Guilty men go free



RUNAWAY FAMILY BACK HOME

by Our Social Services Staff
Dawn Raid

THE fugitive Blair family are finally back in Britain following their three weeks "on the run" in the Seychelles and South Africa.

The Blair children, who had been taken out of school, are said to be "happy and well", but in an emotional letter to the media Mr and Mrs Blair, who describe themselves as an ordinary middle-class couple trying to do the best for their children, ask to "be left alone".

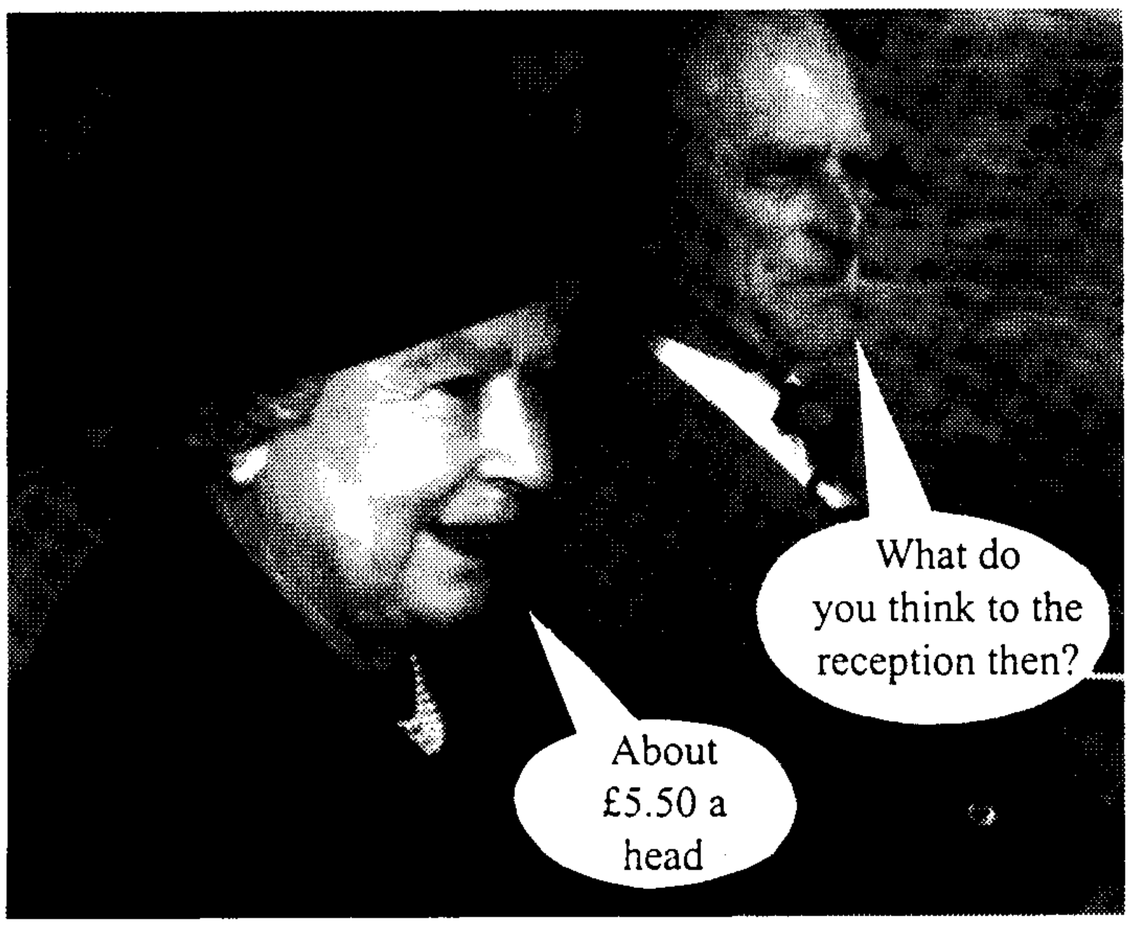
Says the letter, "We just want to get on with our lives without being told how to bring up our children by the likes of Mr Blunkett."

MAX CLIFFORD

Meanwhile, in the Seychelles, a stunned local resident, Mr Cornelius Oranjeboom told the Eye, "I had no idea who they were. They seemed like typical English tourists. They didn't have much to say for themselves, although he used to buy an out-of-date copy of the Daily Express at the local shop.

"When they told me he was the Prime Minister, I thought I'm glad I'm Seychellois rather than British, if that's the best they can do."

NEW-LOOK QUEEN
Part 94: Edward's Wedding



GLENDA SLAGG
THE MILLENNIUM DAME!!!

HATS OFF to Margaret Cook?!?!! Robin's feisty ex-Missus who's had the guts to tell it like it was!! If anyone ever deserved a face full of custard it was two-timin' Robin!! Or was it six-timin', as Margaret says in her best-selling book of bonkin!?!?

Come on Tony Blair — give this gutsy gal a knighthood for speakin' up for jilted wives everywhere!! Good on yer, Margaret, throw the book at Throbbin' Robin!?!?

MARGARET COOK — What a cow!?!!? How can any woman stoop so low to betray the privacy of a marriage!? And what about her kiddies??! Did she stop for a second to think of their tears of shame as other kiddies in the playground start a-gigglin' and a-sniggerin'? *(They're over 30. Ed.)*

You're a disgrace to women everywhere!! No wonder Robin dumped you — who wouldn't?!?! Belt up you lunatic old bag and tell us all some more!?!? *(Shurely 'Give us all a break'? Ed.)*

THREE CHEERS for Texan Jerry, the sizzlin' six-footer who has finally told old Biglips to get lost!?!? She should have done it years ago, says I, but she's a real role model to gals everywhere!! Take the wrinkly ol' Rocker for every penny he's got!! And some!?! That'll teach him to keep his Little Red Rooster under control!?! Geddit???

JERRY HALL — How daft can you get?!? Who did you think you were marrying, honey, babe — the Pope!?! Of course Mick's been a-struttin' and a-ruttin' around the world?!? That's what he gets paid for!?! Don't tell me you only just twigged?? Or are you as thick as you look!?!

(Note to Sub. Rewrite above two paragraphs substituting Rod and Rachel Stewart to fill column. Thanks. I owe you sarnie next time we're in office.)

HAD THE flu yet?!?! I've been on my back all week!! Just wishful thinking Mister!?!?!

Here they are, Glenda's Men of Influenza!?!

Mike Tyson — Hi there Mad Mike!?!? You can come and nibble my ear any time!??

Ron Atkinson — I wonder why they call him "Big Ron"?? Here's hoping!!?!?

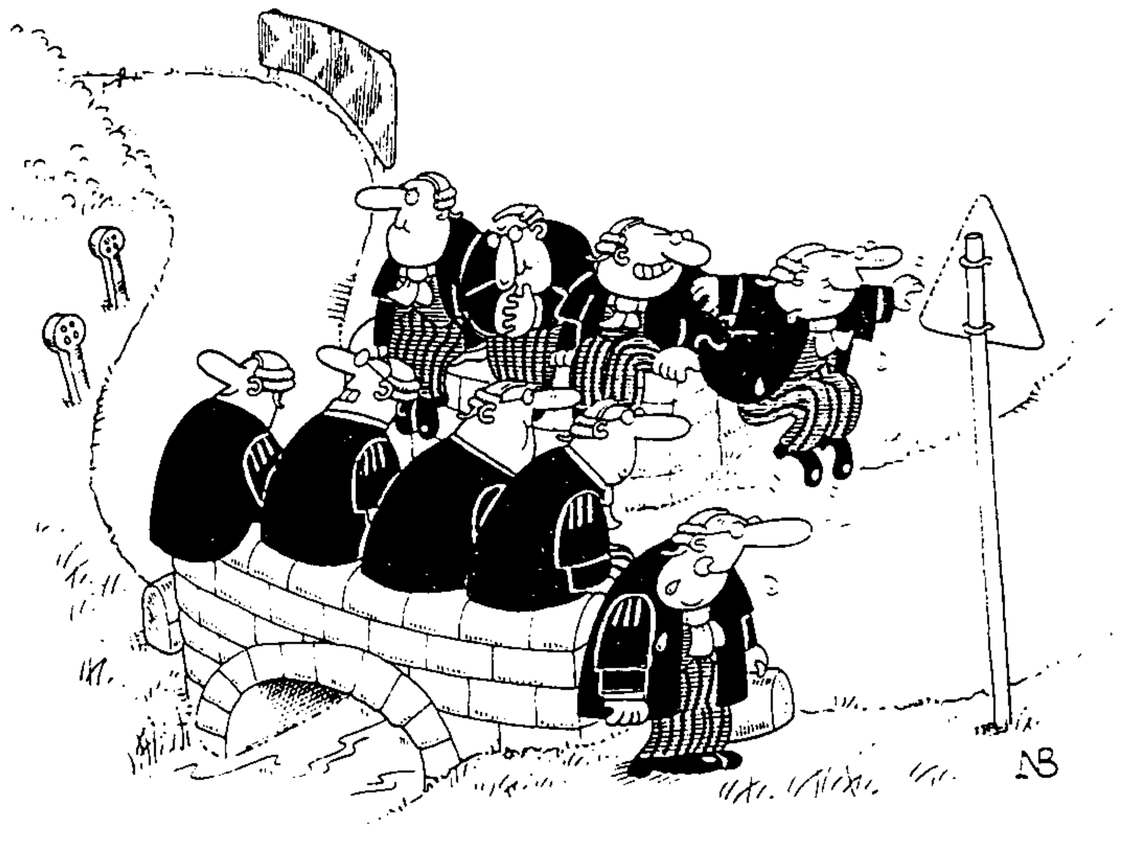
Benjamin Wegg-Prosser!! Crazy name, boring guy!?!?

Byeeeeee!

A Doctor writes

BASTARD! Bastard! Bastard! Beardie Bastard! etc etc.

© Dr Margaret Cook



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

It's wonderful to start the New Year with some really good news!

Yes, I mean Good News! Not dreary second-hand gossip and tittle-tattle and trivia which nobody is interested in!

"Go ye into the world and proclaim the good news," as it says in St Paul's Letter to the Guardian.

It doesn't say "Go out and tell everyone about your friends' marriage breakdowns. Or which of your friends have been stabbing each other in the back." No, it doesn't! Even if all these things are true, which they aren't! And even if they were, it wouldn't be important.

No, the important thing is to move on and to get on with our great mission — which is to spread the good news that we at St Albion's are a united happy team, working together for a common aim!

So, let's take no notice of Mrs Cook. Not the delightful Gaynor, of course, whom we see in church every week turning the pages for her husband in the organ loft!

No, the one I mean is Mr Cook's former wife who sadly has been going round telling anyone who will listen about the sad details of her marriage.

Look, I'm not suggesting that Margaret has made it all up! That would be unfair, though we all know that middle-aged women often suffer from a mid-life crisis where they drink too much and have hallucinations.

So, Margaret, my advice to you, on behalf of all our congregation, would be to start a new life somewhere else, as far away as possible from all the things that you have imagined have happened here!

In the spirit of forgiveness, I suggest you move to New Zealand and don't upset yourself by returning here ever again. (With the "thirty pieces of silver" you received from the St Albion's Examiner, you can surely afford it!)

So enough of Mrs Cook, who would do well to remember that ancient text "If you have nothing nice to say about someone, then surely it is better to say nothing" *(Book of Clichés, 23.12).*

Look, I'll be frank. I've got nothing nice to say about Margaret, so I'm not going to waste the whole of this newsletter going on about what a fool

she is making of herself, and how she would have done much better just to concentrate on what a first-class job her ex-husband is doing for the parish!

But anyway, that's quite enough about Mrs Cook. Although there is one more point that could be made, which is that she might remember the parable of The Woman Whose Husband Was Taken In Adultery.

And what happened to her? She got stoned to death! And in my view quite right too!

Yours in Chrisis, Tony

A LETTER FROM THE EX-CHURCHWARDEN, MR MANDELSON

Dear Tony,

I wondered if I could use the columns of the parish news to clear up some confusion about my recent resignation. It seems that some people are suggesting that I am not sorry enough about what happened. I name no names, but Mr Prescott and Mr Brown will know who I am talking about! I would like to make it clear that I am very sorry indeed for the way these people have failed to understand that I did nothing wrong and that, in retrospect, I perhaps acted a little too hastily in resigning. P.M.

(Quite right, Peter! That's put the record straight! And I would like to make it clear that even though you are no longer Churchwarden, you are still my "personal representative" in the parish. T.B.)

The Editor reserves the right to print all letters in full when they are written by friends of Tony. A.C.

Notices

● The vicar will be giving a talk in the church hall on Monday evening, entitled **"Not Upper Class or Lower Class but Middle Class — The Third Way Again"**. (This is obviously *not* a relaunch of my mission, because my mission does not need relaunching! T.B.)

● The new Church Warden, Dr Cunningham, has suggested replacing the annual wine 'n' cheese do with a weekly **"Champagne and Caviar"** party in the Vestry. Any thoughts? T.B.

To Remember In Your Prayers (Again)...

Our good friend the Rev. William Jefferson Clinton III from the Church of the Seven Day Fornicators, whose flock are at this very moment taking a vote on whether to de-frock him (something they claim he has been doing to various ladies in his congregation). Like Mr Cook, the Rev. Clinton has done a marvellous job, and it really is time for everybody to stop going on about his private life, which is entirely his affair (not that it was an affair, as he has been the first to point out!). Let us pray, therefore, that his people will come to their senses and learn how to move on. T.B.

A MESSAGE FROM MR DOBSON

Director of the St Albion's Hospice

Contrary to what certain ill-informed people have been putting around in the Britannia Arms, there is no shortage of nursing staff in our hospice during the current 'flu epidemic (which incidentally is not an epidemic by any stretch of the imagination, even though everyone seems to have gone down with it!).

We have plenty of nurses here, many of whom have come over from their homes in the Philippines to help us out. And for those of you who say we can't afford them, let me assure you that these girls cost only six times more than their English equivalents, which makes them real value for money, as I am sure our Treasurer Mr Brown would agree! F.D.

(Well done, Frank! T.B.)

Kiddies Korner

The Story Of The Man Who Was Saved

And one day, when the disciples were out fishing, one of them said, "Master, there is a Danish tourist drowning over there. What shall we do?" And he said unto them, "I shall go and rescue him forthwith," walking on the water as he did so. And when the man was brought forth from the water, he cried "What is all the fuss about? I was just out for a swim, and waving to my wife who was on the shore."

The Moral: *There's no pleasing some people!* T.B.

Thought For The Day

"The wages of spin is death"
Book of Lost Job

(Sent in by Mr Livingstone, proprietor of our local aquatic pet centre Newts R Us)

THE EDWARD & SOPHIE OFFICE TEA-MUG

Your Exclusive Souvenir Of The Wedding Of The Millennium!

Lord Gnome's Really Wonderful Wedding Co is privileged to present the perfect memento for this unique occasion in the long and glorious annals of the British monarchy.

Designed by world-famous office tea-mug artist Sir Tetley Brooke-Bond P.G., the Edward and Sophie Mug is fashioned from sturdy, dishwasher-friendly, recycled organic porcelain.

✵

Commemorate the Prince's formative years as one of the world's leading tea-makers with an heirloom that will be treasured by your children, your children's partners' children and your children's partners' step-children's live-in same-sex "special friends" for generations to come.

✵

Don't miss this incredible opportunity to own a piece of our island history!

Send now £999.99 (inc VAT) to Gnome Really Ghastly Mug Offer, PO Box 99, Unit 45, The Trading Estate, Midsomer Madness, Somerset.

Also available: The Mick 'n' Jerry Souvenir Divorce Mug. Only £30 million.

★★★★ US NEWS ★★★★

WOMAN DEMANDS DNA TEST ON CLINTON 'CHILD'

by Our Washington Staff AMBROSE EVANS-ABOVE

THE MOTHER of an 18-year-old girl last night demanded that President Clinton take a DNA test to establish the paternity of her daughter.

"I want the whole world to know that the President is not the father of my child," said the woman, who would only give her name as Mrs Hillary Roddam Clinton.

"The idea that that lying, adulterous creep has got anything to do with my sweet little child is too terrible to even contemplate," said Mrs Clinton.

"Why can't the President just admit that we never had sex together?" she stormed, "And that he has no claim over my little Chelsea." *(Rutters)*

Advertisement

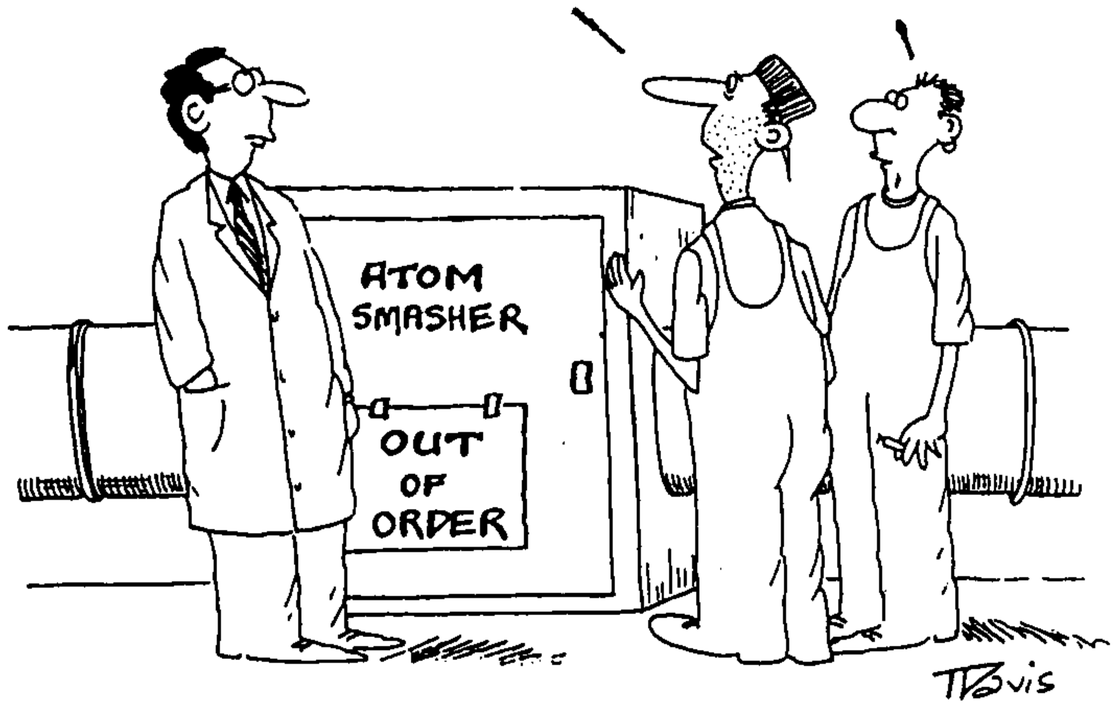
Who Would You Like To Have A One-2-One With?

This Week: The Radio Authorities & Chris Evans

AS A spokesman for the Radio Authority, I'd like to have a one-to-one with Chris Evans and ask him why he gave somebody's mobile phone number out over the radio? I'd like to ask Chris Evans if, like me, he thought it was a bit rich for him to go on about "media exploitation", after having just used his own radio station to settle an old score? I'd also like to ask Chris Evans if *he'd* like it if we gave *his* private phone number out live on air? Just imagine the fuss he'd make if hundreds of people phoned *him* up, called *him* all the names under the sun, and issued *him* with death threats? Mind you, he could then ring up John Lennon and find out what it is like when it actually happens...

... I dunno, Prof — could be your particles or it could be your wave form...

... we won't know 'til we have a look...



Quantum Mechanics

THE Sun

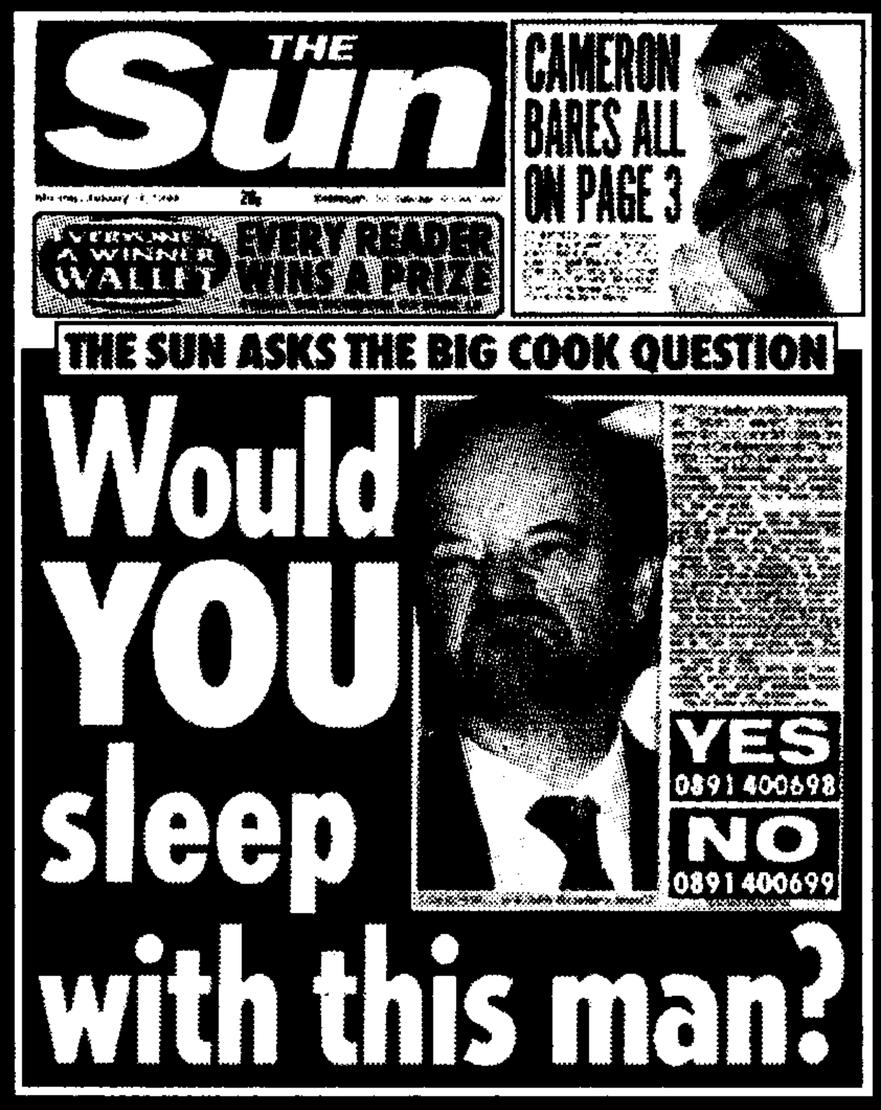
Friday, January 22, 1999

● Should Edward Grow A Robin-Cook-Style Beard For His Wedding?

● You decide — ring 0898 46112

THE SUN ASKS

Would YOU read this newspaper?



WE ask the burning question of the day: Are you stupid enough to read the Sun?
Ring in now on the special Sun Dim Line: 0898 3333.

If you are too thick to understand even the simple words in this headline, why not subscribe to Sky TV and enjoy the pictures?

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BLAIR IN SECRET VISIT SHOCK

by Our Medical Staff
Spin Dr Alastair Campbell

THE PRIME Minister has made a secret visit to the front page of the Times, it was revealed yesterday.

Tony Blair decided to drop in on page one after allegations that the government was failing to tackle the NHS crisis.

Downing Street wanted to keep the visit quiet, insisting that it should only appear with a huge headline above the fold.

"Tony is not doing this as a publicity stunt," said a spokesman. "He really cares about newspapers and the chronic shortage of stories. He is doing everything he can to ensure that papers can be put to bed. Unlike NHS patients."

The visit, which lasted a good ten column inches, was a great success but there were critics.

Said one unimpressed newspaper worker, "If he really wanted to make a secret visit, why didn't he go to the Independent?"

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Ted Hughes

So. Hullo again.
Ted Hughes.

Now that you are dead
You are winning
More prizes
Than
Ever before.

First the T.S. Eliot.
Then the
Whitbread.

What next?
Perhaps they will make you
Poet Laureate.

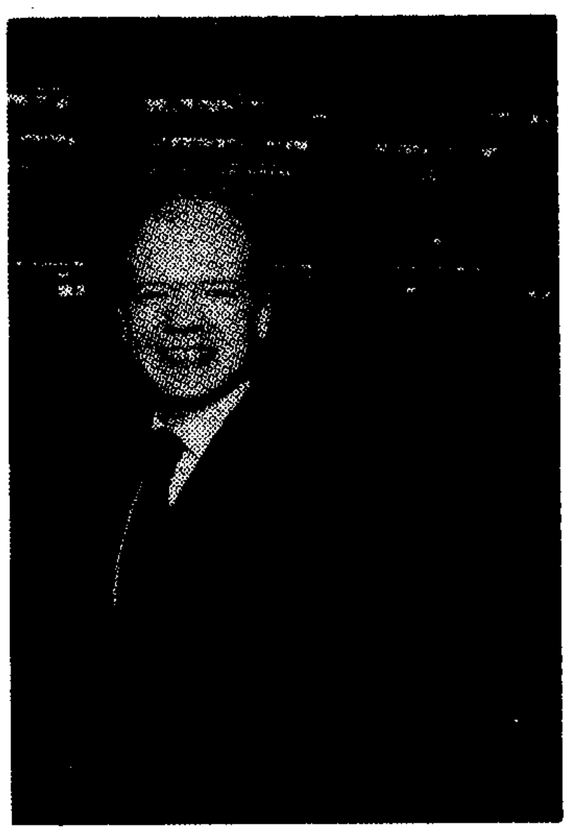
The late E.J. Thribb (17fi)

E.J. Thribb will be reading from a collection of his life's work *Better Dead Than Read* at Waterstone's Bookshop, Neasden High Street, on Tuesday morning at 9.30am.

(BBC2) GREAT RAILWAY JOURNEYS

WILLIAM HAGUE

From Ilkley Moor to Baht-At



Announcer: Following the triumph of Michael Portillo's film of his journey across Spain from El Defeato to Conquestadore di Partido Conservativo, William Hague takes his own sentimental journey back to the land of his ancestors, Yorkshire.

(Shot of Grimthorpe Colliery Band playing Jerusalem in rain on rainswept station platform. Enter leader of Conservative Party in casual clothes — baseball cap, safari suit — munching Hovis fish paste sandwich)

Tannoy Announcement: We regret to announce that the 7.42 Great Northern Express Service from Ilkley Moor to Baht-At has been cancelled. This is due to the wrong kind of trains on the line (ie, none).

Hague: My grandfather was born in the middle of the Yorkshire Civil War. Half the county said that Len Hutton was t'greatest batsman ever seen. The other half supported t'great Herbie Sutcliffe. It split families down the middle. My Uncle Albert was a fanatical Sutcliffe-ite. While my Dad, a gentle idealist soft-drinks manufacturer, was a Hutton-ista. I tell you, many's the time they nearly came to blows on this one.

(Takes out onion and begins to weep as band plays "I Vow To Thee My County". Rain falls even harder)

Tannoy Announcement: There really is no point in customers waiting on this platform, since all services to everywhere have been cancelled.

Hague: When you've come from a divided background, like I have, you're filled with the desire to unite the country behind you and make Britain whole again — as whole as this wholemeal bread.

(Band plays New World Symphony from famous TV commercial. Hague begins to walk determinedly down railway track)

Hague: That's why I'm going on this journey. A journey to somewhere, from nowhere. It's not a glamorous journey in a fancy Spanish train, round places with high-falutin' foreign names, like some people's journeys I can think of. No, this is an English journey, Down-to-earth, Honest, No-nonsense. The sort of journey decent folk want to go on with me as their guide.

So, come on then, climb aboard, even if there's no train. And we'll get there together, without the need for any blokes with foreign names and funny haircuts going on about how dignified and honourable they are, just because they're half Spanish. Who won the Battle of the Armada, I'd like to remind him!

(Brass band plays "Land of Hope and Tory" as caption "Vote Conservative" appears on screen and credits roll)

Tannoy Announcement: We regret to announce that this programme will not now be shown, owing to the wrong kind of presenter on the screen. Normal Portillo will be resumed as soon as possible.

NEW FROM
PLODDINGTONS

Haven't A Cluedo!

THE SLEUTHING GAME
FOR DETECTIVES EVERYWHERE!

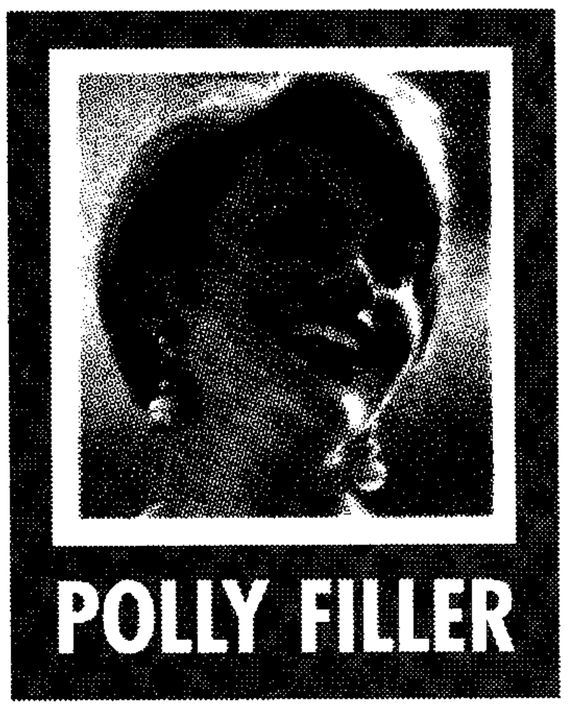
Master Black has been found stabbed to death in the street.

Can you guess who dunnit? No, nor can the police. It wasn't Mr White that's for sure. Oh no. Not him. Nor his mates. Perhaps it was nobody.

Not much fun for all the family.

Says top Inspector Bullock, *"I played* Haven't A Cluedo *for years, but I had to retire early."*

The Eye's Exciting New Columnist!!



POLLY FILLER

Don't talk to me about the flu epidemic! And, believe me, it is an epidemic whatever they say on the television.

Typically, Simon, my partner, was the first to go down with it. Men. They're so competitive, even about being ill.

They've always got to be first in everything. And worst in everything. However, I noticed he wasn't too ill to get up and watch the sumo wrestling on Eurosport.

Not content with having it himself, Simon promptly gave it to our two-year old, Charlie.

Charlie gave it to everyone in his playgroup, which led to a lot of whingeing telephone calls from the other mums.

"Don't tell me your problems," I said. "I've got plenty of my own. The video's on the blink."

Then, to cap it all, our wretched Croatian nanny also succumbed, or says she did.

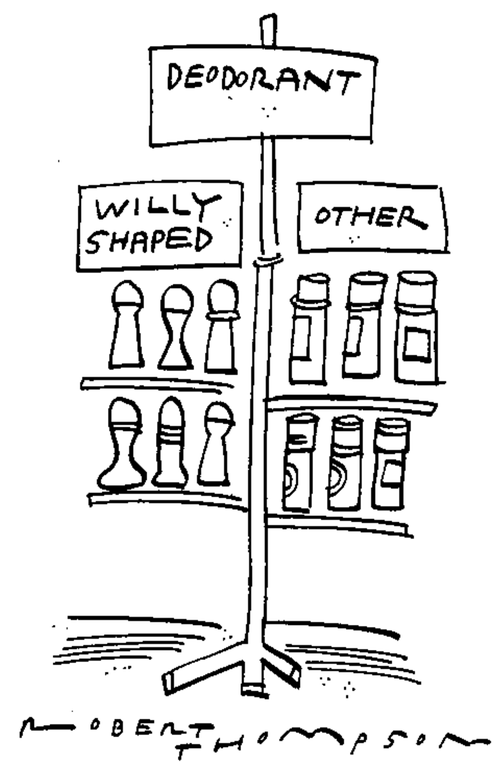
What is the point of these East European girls, if they can't stay well?

Aren't they supposed to have come through a war or something? And then, at the first sign of a little flu virus, they keel over and say they can't even go out to Sainsbury's to do the weekly shop.

So there I am. No food. No video. No help. House full of moaning so-called invalids.

There's obviously only one thing to do. Book myself into a health farm for a fortnight, and leave the rest of them to get on with it, the selfish little sods.

© *All newspapers.*



TV PRODUCER MARRIES PR GIRL

by Our Entire Staff

THE people of Britain were last night not in the least bit interested *(shurely 'over the moon'? Ed)* when it was announced that a man who produces television programmes is going to marry a woman who works in public relations.

From John O'Groats to Land's End, the story was the same — people turning to each other and saying, "I feel terrible with this 'flu. Have you had it yet?" *(Shurely 'Aren't they a lovely couple?' Ed.)*

FLU'S AT TEN

Champagne corks popped in the offices of newspapers, but nowhere else, as editors looked forward to a whole year of filling up acres of space with stories about "The Unknown PR Girl Who Is To Marry The Little-Known TV Executive".

TINTIN ARRESTED FOR WAR CRIMES

by Our Legal Staff **Polly Tickly-Correkt**

AN ELDERLY Belgian man, formerly a boy reporter, was detained in Brussels last night and charged with being a Nazi sympathiser.

Tintin, 70, has furiously denied the allegations, pointing to his record as a liberator of slaves ("The Red Sea Sharks"), friend of minority groups ("Tintin in Tibet") and opponent of fascist dictators ("The Calculus Affair").

However, his accusers point out that during his early career in the Congo ("Tintin Au Congo") he supported imperialism and had a patronising attitude towards the native population.

His friendship with nuclear scientist and rocket designer Professor Calculus is cited as proof of his totalitarian leanings and calling his dog "Snowy" is pretty clear evidence of his racism.

Said a friend, Captain Haddock, 98, "Blistering Barnacles and Thundering Typhoons".

Other supporters include the Thompson Twins (Harry and Harold), who dismiss the charges as "nonsense".

"It was all a long time ago. Tintin should be allowed to enjoy his retirement in peace. Besides, he was only obeying Hergé."

● *Read Tintin's new adventure "Tintin Dans Le Prison", only in the Young Telegraph.*

Sophie Rhys-~~Bridget~~ Jones's Diary

December 23. Bermuda.

Weight: 9st 4lb (still not v. Di-like). Wait (for Eddie to pop question): 1598 days, 5 hours, 20 min (v. disappointing).

Ooh! E has whisked me away for "romantic break" (5 star hotel, private balcony, twin beds). Hope this may be turning point in relationship. Biological clock still ticking — am beginning to feel more like next Queen Mum than next Princess Di. Should have listened to mother's advice about not getting involved with unreliable theatricals.

Have issued ultimatum — put up or shut up. Have got to put foot down. All my PR-girlfriends are now Smug Marrieds (Serena and Viscount L, Jemima K, etc) or Smug Divorcees (Julia C). If I'd wanted to stay as lifelong Singleton, would have followed Sarah McC's example and started dating Gordon Brown.

Even the Press are dropping hints about E shirking his royal engagements. Aaargh! Why do I always end up with commitment-phobic emotional fuckwits? Maybe I should chat up Harry instead — H possibly more grown-up than Eddie.

9pm E. says he has important proposal for me. Sigh. Am fed up with pretending to be interested in his TV things. Is probably another documentary about Real Tennis (yawn).

9.30pm Ohmigod! Have just agreed to become Royal Bride! What have I let self in for? Better start practising radiant smile in manner of saintly Diana-type person. Guess this means I'll have to buy Big Hats (eg fruit-basket thing for Ascot, helmet for abseiling down Welsh Dam, etc)

January 7

Column inches: 323 (tabs), 10,564 (broadsheets). Pounds gained: several million (no longer v poor).

Is clearly important for modern royal to stay in touch with attitudes of Common People. Not difficult — just like common people, am already sick of boring articles about Royal Wedding.

Charles has offered to do us a Wedding Oatcake and organic champagne-style wine from Highgrove (Uuurgh. Will get my PA to send polite refusal). Asks if he can bring Camilla. Say yes, providing she wears veil (or Mister Blobby suit). Don't want her spoiling Wedding Photo. Have decided on small private ceremony — just a few select media organisations. Not hiring Abbey or going way OTT like Diana did for HER funeral. Am bloody fed up with shallow portrayal of self as new Diana.

So much to do before the Big Day — eg copyrighting my "image"

for use on marge tubs, hammering out deal with suppliers of Royal Wedding dinnnerware, porcelain figurines, My Little Sophie beanie-babies, etc.

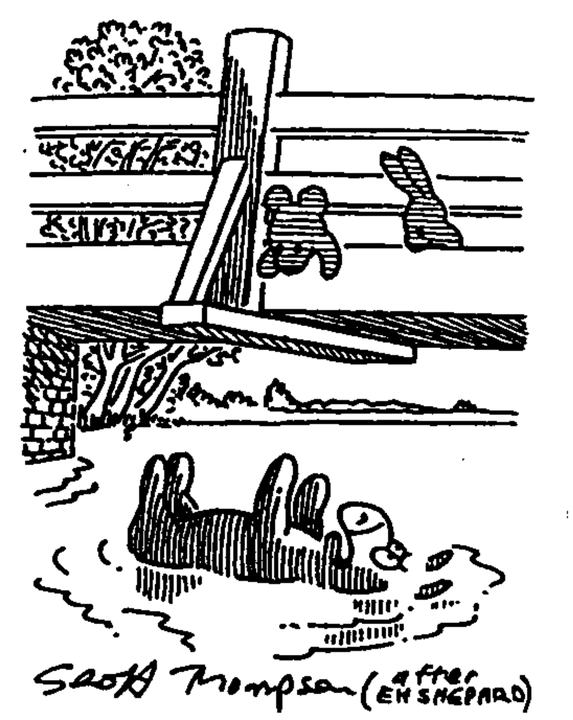
January 10

Units of alcohol: 18 (celebratory bubbly with the girls). Weight: 8st 12lb (yesss! Will soon be able to take on traditional Duchess role in Weight Watchers ad).

Drink with Ju (Carling) and Hezza (Annabel) — wondering what my Royal Title should be. Ju likes "P.R. In Love", I prefer "Sophie: Her Dull Story". Maybe get Morton involved? If not too busy with suck-and-tell biog of Monica.

Is also Wedding List to consider. Could maybe ask Rupert M for sofa (and a chat show, à la Fergie).

11pm Argorisallblurry. Ooops! Beginning to get cold feet (bad sign for future Duchess, considering Toe Job incident etc). Big day could easily be disaster of Noel's House Party proportions, even with my organisational expertise. And Royal Wife is hardly position with much job security. Eeek! Why did I have to rush into things like this after only 5 years?...



"Quick, Pooh, phone Tony Blair"

'WE DO BELIEVE IN SANTER' EU's shock vote

by Our EU Staff **Brussel Twisk**

IN an amazing *volte-face*, the European Parliament last night decided that the much-loved figure of Santer was not a fraud after all.

Furious Euro-MPs had been claiming that Santer, best known for doling out millions of pounds worth of gifts to anyone who writes to him, was nothing more than a deception practised on the gullible by cynical commercial interests.

Santer, otherwise known as St Nickallyourmoney, and his team of "little helpyourselfers" have long been part of European folklore.

No one has challenged the story before now and it has been Christmas every day at the European Commission as "presents" were doled out to those whom Santer considered "had behaved themselves".

Suddenly people were openly claiming that they no longer believed in Santer and that they were going to close down his Brussels grotto.

However, common sense prevailed and the Parliament voted by 626 to nil to carry on pretending that Santer is genuine.

"Et in Arcade ego..."

TV SHIT NEW SHOW

(Shurely 'TV'S HIT NEW SHOW?')

by Our Media Correspondent **Sharah Shannon**

"WHO WANTS To Be A Millionaire?" has become the top-rated television programme in the country with an amazing 75 million people tuning in to see members of the public win or lose a fortune.

The formula is simple — contestants are asked a series of questions in order to take home huge sums of cash.

A typical episode last week featured Peter, from Westminster, who had the chance of scooping a staggering £375,000. Here were the testing questions that Peter had to answer:

- **For £10,000 — Are you an MP?**
- **For £100,000 — Are you in the Shadow Cabinet?**
- **For £200,000 — Are you a close personal friend of Tony Blair?**

The Quiz Master-General Geoffrey Robinson allowed Peter the opportunity to ring up a "friend", go 50/50 with the Britannia Building Society or refer the whole thing to the public.

But Peter chose to tell nobody. He answered all the questions correctly and decided to go for the £375,000 jackpot — enough for a dream house and an upmarket sofa designed by Terence Conran.

All he had to do was answer the last question correctly: "Isn't taking this money a bit dodgy given that your department is meant to be investigating the Quiz Master-General?"

Peter hesitated, sweat broke out on his forehead and then, to the amusement of millions of viewers, he gave the incorrect answer: "No, I have done nothing wrong."

It was all over, Peter crashed out of the game and lost everything. The producers, however, insist that this is all part of the fun and that in the end it is only entertainment.

("Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?" is based on an original idea by the Conservative Party called "Greed", which has been adapted by Tony Blair.)

That Wedding

How They Are Related

King Edward The Unready
|
King Edward The Potato
|
King Eddie The Eagle
|
King Edward VIII
|
King Edward Fox
|
Edward Bear
|
Edward The Teamaker

Mistress Blobby
|
Mandy Rhys-Davies
|
Mandy Rees-Mogg
|
Griff Rhys-Jones
|
Mel-inda Smith
|
Melinda Messenger
|
Jones The PR

HEATH'S PRIVATE VIEW

WHATS ON TELLY?
I DO STRAIGHT WITH A RUBBER BUT A CLINTON WILL COST YOU FIFTY..
PROSTITUTE
I LIKE HER TO PUT A NAPPY ON ME AN' THEN I LIKE BEING CHANGED
?
FLAT 69
NATIONAL LOTTERY LIVE
OOO! YOU'VE GOT NICE BUNS! WOULD YOU LIKE TO PLAY WITH MY PACKAGE? WHO HAVE YOU BEEN DOWN ON? I MEAN WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO! OOO WHAT AM I SAYING!!
WHAT A BUMP!
NOW FOR £50,000... TAKE YOUR TIME... THE EIFFEL TOWER... IS IT IN (A) PARIS (B) NEW YORK (C) SIAM ? TAKE YOUR TIME..
NEW YORK! YOU PRAT
WE FOUND HER IN A SKIP. SHE'S BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED WITH A BOTTLE, AND THEY'D CUT OFF HER ARMS WITH A HACK SAW. SHE WAS ONE OF THE GIRLS IN MY MANOR, LOOK.....
SHE WAS VERY PRETTY WASN'T SHE? FANCY A PINT?
IS THIS HOW YOU LIKE IT LUV?
PANT! PANT!!
THIS IS DISGUSTING!
YOUR HUSBAND IS SLEEPING WITH YOUR MOTHER!
'E'S GOT 'IS PECKER OUT! SEE!? 'E'S GOT IT IN 'IS 'AND!
WOT YOU DOIN' WIV THAT PAPER TISSUE? YOU DIRTY BASTARD! I ALWAYS KNEW YOU WAS A WANKER!
HEATH

DIARY

MARGARET COOK

Actually, I feel very, very sorry for him. He's looking so old and wrinkled and unhappy these days! Urgh! For his sake, I only wish it hadn't turned out like this!! I only wish I hadn't had to inform the world that he's a self-serving, cheese-paring, paranoid little toad who's so randy he'd leap on his own granny in her grave if he could only get his hands on a shovel. It's a desperately miserable situation for him!! And with so much at stake!!

But it's Gaynor I feel really sorry for!!! It really doesn't seem fair on her, poor love!!! Just when she's settled so nicely into Chevening, with all her lovely new dresses and everyone on the verge of forgetting she's just another jumped-up little secretary who got her claws into her boss, poor Gaynor's had to discover through reading the Sunday newspapers that she's actually shacked up with an alcoholic weasel who spent most of their courtship plotting to leave her. I'll never forgive myself if she leaves him!!!!

It was 12.26 on June 9th 1992. The day before, Robin had confessed to me he was having an affair with my new horse, Randy. But after drinking two bottles of Remy Martin, he had vowed never to see Randy again, other than at essential gymkhanas.

As I understood it, we were both keen that our marriage should surmount these obstacles, but over breakfast the next day Robin had involuntarily let out a whinny before cantering around the kitchen in search of coco-pops. He had temporarily forgotten he was no longer in the stables. It was a grossly insensitive act, but for the sake of our marriage I chose to ignore it.

It was sunny, so we decided to go for a picnic to patch things up. But as I was packing the sandwiches, Robin suddenly snapped. "That hamper! Look what colour it is!"

"It's... brown," I said.

"Brown! Brown!" he yelled. "Yet you know how Brown is trying to frustrate my career at every turn! And he's a complete nobody! Future Chancellor, my foot! I know more sums than him! He can't even do six threes!... And he's not even Scottish — he just puts on that accent. Everyone knows he's really a Pakistani! Oh, Margaret, Margaret — how could you torment me so!"

At this point, the phone rang. "Oh Tony, how super to hear your voice!" said Robin. "Margaret and I were just going out for a modest picnic in your honour! And how's the lovely Cherie? Super! What's that you say — a fairer tax system, taking more money from the poor to give to the better off? Sounds great to me, Tony! Cheery-bye! Big kiss!"

After he had put down the phone, Robin looked as pleased as punch. I suggested to him that in order to get on, he had sold his soul to the devil. "But he gave me an excellent price for it," he replied, triumphantly. I could tell he was buoyed up by the way he was unzipping his trousers. "Tony said I was doing an *excellent* job," he commented. He then leered in my direction. "Any chance of a shag?"

Robin could be desperately insensitive, without a thought for the feelings of others. So I was determined that the rest of the world — not forgetting our young lads — should know all about it. After all, it's not every young man who has a drunken lecherous has-been for a father and a devoted and discreet public servant for a mother!

Throughout our married life, I struggled to keep it all secret. These are just one or two of the things I tried desperately to keep my sons from finding out. I'm thinking of the day Robin rushed into the house, sat down on the cat, swigged from a bottle of cooking sherry, broke wind and started singing bawdy songs about Peter Mandelson. I'm thinking of the way he would behave like an ostrich, racing around the room on two legs wearing nothing but a feather boa, his neck outstretched, desperately trying to fly. And I'm thinking of how his memory began to have gaping hiatuses, induced by drink and sleeping pills. Out of the goodness of my heart I once told him he'd been Prime Minister for the past six months following the death of Tony Blair. The look of joy on his face was a thing to behold!

On May 19th 1997, Robin came into the room wearing a school cap and shorts and sucking his thumb. I could tell at a glance he was putting on his little-boy act. In this mood, he was prone to boasting. "Actually, I'm not having an affair with Pamela Anderson," he said, out of the blue, "But I could if I wanted to. *So there!*"

By this, I judged that he wanted me to think he *was* having an affair with Pamela Anderson, perhaps so that in this way he could make me feel guilty that I did not have a starring role in TV's "Baywatch". But I rose above it. "That's nice for you," I said.

"*And* I could be Foreign Secretary one day if I wanted to," he continued, "'cos Tony said so."

I said nothing. I just continued to peel the sprouts.

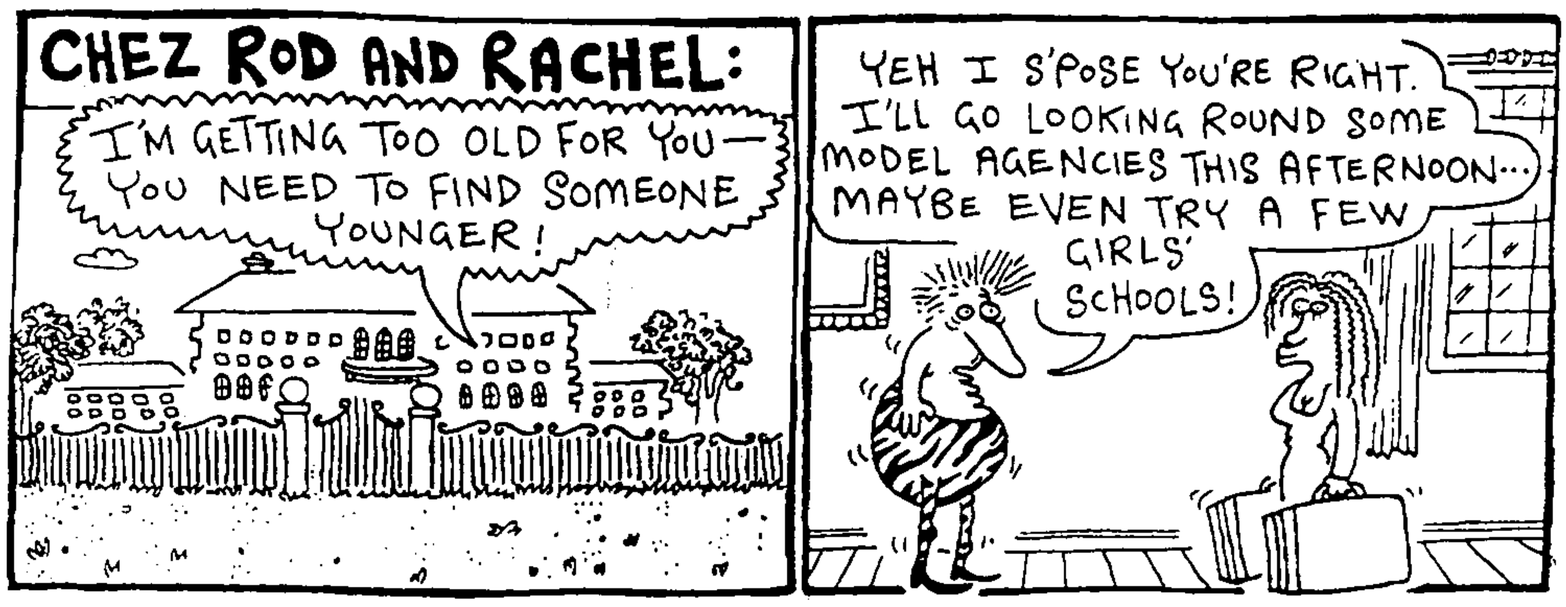
"And Pamela Anderson says she would love to welcome foreign dignitaries with me. And at the same time she thinks she could get me a part as a lifeguard on Baywatch, which Tony agrees would greatly enhance Britain's reputation at home and abroad, and..."

I let him go on. Two hours later, I found him flat on his back in the toilet with his trousers round his ankles and a brandy bottle at his side, his right hand still twitching a little as it attempted to draft an opposition amendment to the Tory Government's latest white paper.

In describing this scene, I have been as gentle as possible. One doesn't want to hurt his feelings — after all, there's no telling how touchy he gets! I haven't mentioned, for instance, how The Rt Hon Little Robin Diddums once confessed to having had a brief fling with our pet hamster, Totty, or how he secretly placed a "Kick Me" sign on Gordon Brown's back as they emerged from a Shadow Cabinet meeting or how he always keeps a six-pack of Special Brew in his... You see, that might endanger his future career as a senior backbencher. And that's the last thing I'd wish to do.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


CHEZ ROD AND RACHEL:
I'M GETTING TOO OLD FOR YOU— YOU NEED TO FIND SOMEONE YOUNGER!
YEH I S'POSE YOU'RE RIGHT. I'LL GO LOOKING ROUND SOME MODEL AGENCIES THIS AFTERNOON... MAYBE EVEN TRY A FEW GIRLS' SCHOOLS!

The fabric in this shit is a high quality allcotton. It will mellow with age and actually improve with each laundering

Ralph Lauren label

WITH a black Arkansas prostitute saying he's the mother of her 13-year-old son, another as yet unspecified scandal about to blow and a Senate vote looming about his Monica Lewinsky lies, I think President Bill Clinton may heed the advice of senior Democratic Party colleagues and use his State of the Nation address on January 19 to resign.

Daily Mail

Literary Review

Gordon Brown Nose

Mandy: The Unauthorised Biography of Peter Mandelson
Paul Routledge
(Simon & Schuster, £17.99)

BIOGRAPHIES of serving politicians are usually regrettable — and, luckily for the authors, forgettable.

Who remembers *Geoffrey Howe: A Quiet Revolutionary*, written by Peter Clarke and Judy Hillman in 1988? Or the *two* full-length lives of Kenneth Clarke that were rushed out in 1994 on the assumption that he would succeed John Major in 10 Downing Street? Or Michael Gove's reverential tome, *Michael Portillo: The Future of the Right* (1995), which somehow overlooked the possibility that Portillo's future might lie in presenting TV documentaries about Spanish railways?

Like these pitiable predecessors, *Mandy* is not a biography in the ordinary sense of the word. As Routledge admits in his final paragraph, "it is too early to say what epitaph history will give to Peter Benjamin Mandelson". *Now* he tells us — after the hapless reader has slogged through nearly 300 pages in the vain search for any new insight.

Mandelson, we learn, is a wily and manipulative character who is not widely loved in the Labour party. Fancy! He is gay, but doesn't like to talk about it. Who would have guessed? Oh, and in a sensational last chapter Routledge discloses that Mandy wishes to become "leader of the Labour Party and prime minister of his country". An astonishing ambition for a senior politician to have.

Routledge's only genuine scoop was the story about Mandelson's home-loan. But he can't even take the credit for this since, by his own admission, he had decided to omit it so as not to embarrass his chum Charlie Whelan. No wonder the *Sunday Times* lost interest in serialising the book, leaving Routledge's own paper, the *Mirror*, to do the honours. A remarkably generous gesture by Piers Morgan, who might well have wondered why his highly-paid political hack had spent the past few months sitting on a hot story with view to flogging it elsewhere and/or suppressing it.

Deprived of the main selling point, the *Mirror* did its best to serve up the reheated leftovers with a fresh garnish. The news of Mandy's "secret" letter to Gordon Brown at the time of the 1994 leadership contest was splashed all over the front page, together with the "revelation" that it had been leaked by Brown's brother John. Both these facts, however, had been widely publicised a year earlier, when Routledge produced his admiring biography of the chancellor.

What, then, is the point of this hastily-assembled cuttings-job? In his life of Gordon Brown, Routledge noted that if Tony Blair stood down "towards the end of his second term in, say, the year 2005, Brown would still be only 54 — the same age that Margaret Thatcher was when first elected prime minister in 1979. And, unlike her, he would have almost a decade of top-level ministerial performance under his belt." In other words, the book was essentially a pre-emptive manifesto for Brown's leadership bid in six years' time. Now he has followed it up with an equally brazen anti-manifesto for one of Gordon's main rivals: hence the warnings of Mandelson's "covert [*sic*] ambition to rise to the top".

In a cabinet where no argument is permitted, ministers have to fight their battles by proxy through friendly hacks. Colin Brown of the *Independent* was first out of the traps in 1997 with his biography of John Prescott, which set out to prove that the "modern yet traditional" deputy PM would be just the chap to restore morale if the Blair Project went pear-shaped. Only three months ago the BBC reporter John Kampfner issued a slab-like biography of Robin Cook, presenting him as a formidable statesman whose prospects shouldn't be underrated. (Alas for Kampfner, yet another book has now put paid to that.) Soon we shall be treated to an authorised life of Mandelson by Don Macintyre of the *Independent*, who will argue the case for rehabilitating and promoting the Sultan of Spin.

And all this before the government has celebrated its second anniversary. Can *Frank Dobson: The Man Behind the Beard* be far behind?

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS Pt 94

All In The Mind: A Farewell to God
Sir Ludicrous Kennedy

NOW that I'm reaching eighty I've been giving some serious thought to this God business, and do you know I've decided that he doesn't exist at all? Fancy that! Believe you me, the evidence is pretty conclusive. I mean, I read a very interesting article in the Spectator the other day which said that lots of Catholic priests are pederasts and that only 42 Irish girls last year wanted to become nuns.

Plus you wouldn't believe what the history books have to say about Christianity. Apparently they had this appalling thing several hundred years ago called the Inquisition which actually used to burn heretics at the stake. As for the hypocritical Victorians, who were around in the nineteenth century, they used religion as a means of social control. I discovered a very interesting hymn called *All Things Bright And Beautiful* which proves this indisputably. A man called Charles Darwin, too, has some very pointed things to say about all this.

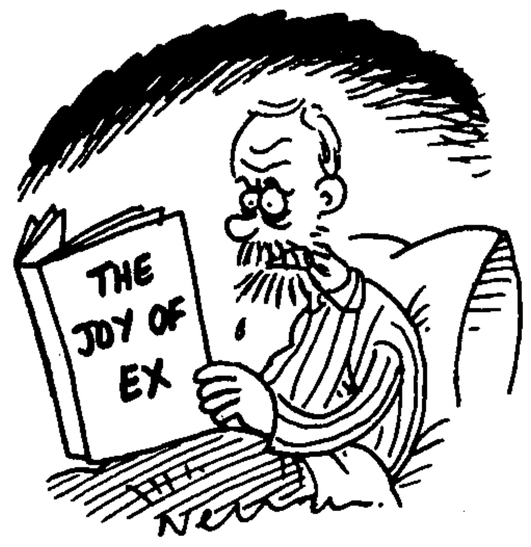
Seriously, though, where is God? What does he look like? Why doesn't he talk to us? And why does he let so many bad things happen? If God really did exist he'd answer important questions like this and no mistake (cont. p.94)

Books & Bookmen

■ POOR old Roger Lewis won't have any heroes left if he carries on writing biographies of them. The former Oxford don, best known for his admirably thorough if eccentric *The Life and Death of Peter Sellers*, has now turned his attention to Anthony Burgess for Picador.

As with his researches into Sellers, though, Lewis appears to be turning against his subject more with each passing day. When his publisher Peter Straus called to check how the book was coming along, Lewis replied "I've found lots of new material, Peter. I'm going to crucify him."

Straus, somewhat taken aback, indicated that he had been expecting a balanced portrait of the novelist, and that, in view of this, perhaps Picador should review its commitment to the project. Guarded at the best of times, Straus is now apparently greeting innocent inquiries into his author's



progress with a terse statement that Lewis is indeed "under contract" to produce a life of Burgess. For how much longer this is the case remains to be seen.

■ CAN there be any connection between these three facts?

1 On 15 January the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph* reported Alan Bennett's diary in the *London Review of Books* in which he announced his refusal of an Oxford honorary degree because of "bully" Rupert Murdoch's sponsorship of the university's chair in language and communication.

2 On 15 January a representative of publishers HarperCollins rang the *London Review of Books* cancelling a quarter-page advertisement in the following issue for a book by Jonathan Rutherford.

3 HarperCollins is owned by Rupert Murdoch.

■ BANNING critical biographies of himself at the Waterstone's store within Harrods is just one of Mohamed Fayed's many radical ideas about bookselling (see *Eye* 962), it seems.

An ex-member of the store's staff was overheard recently remembering when several Fayed henchmen came to check on the literary corner of the empire. "It looks very good," the senior goon said, "but couldn't you put all of the books with red covers together?"

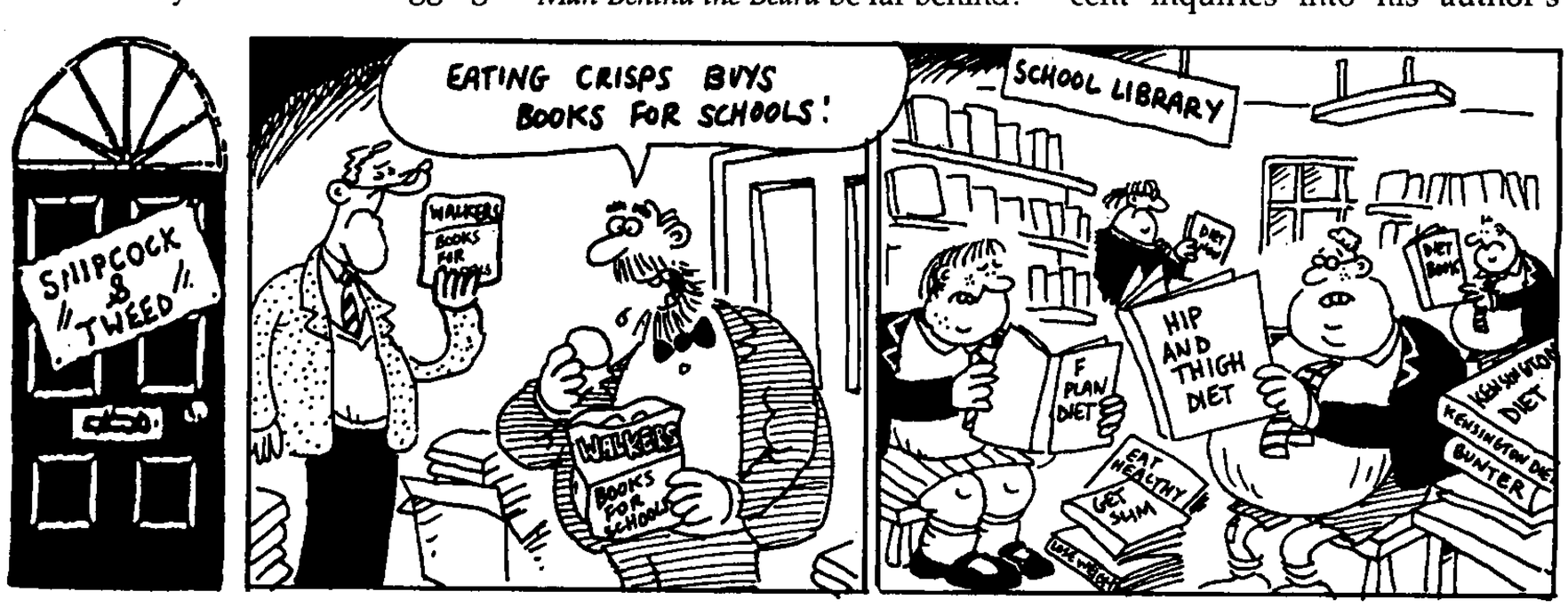
■ HAPPILY the casualties of Orion's takeover of Cassell have begun to reemerge in New Grub Street, with former Gollancz editor Humphrey Price surfacing at Virgin Publishing as editorial director of general books.

Once employed elsewhere, perhaps those made redundant will regard the whole affair as a blessing in disguise. Why? Well, at least it means they don't have to contend with the brusque and bizarre conversational matter of Cassell's new paymaster, Anthony "Fatty" Cheetham, a man uncharitably described by a fellow publisher as an "Old Etonian shit".

■ THERE have been raised eyebrows in Westminster bookshops recently over a new book called *The Laundrymen*.

The critics quoted on its dust-jacket are effusive: "An eye-opening exposé of the gigantic scale of global money scrubbing, running the gamut from despots to tax evaders", say the *Mail*, while the *Times* say it shows that "fact outdoes fiction any day". The well-informed author of the tome? One "Jeffrey" Robinson (no relation).

'Bookworm'



footnotes

PRATTFALL

SARAH WILSON, the young mother who was jailed for importing cocaine after being hoodwinked by her drug-dealing lover, has won leave to appeal against her sentence but not her conviction.

The lover, Karl Wheeler, who conned her into a Caribbean "holiday" so that he could bring back the drugs, turned Queen's evidence and got eight years. Sarah, who pleaded not guilty, was given 12 (for the full story see WHAT A PRATT! — believed to be a reference to his Honour Judge Pratt *Eye* 956).

SARAH WILSON

The *Eye* has been contacted by Kevin McCulloch, who got 20 years for his part in the drugs run, with a story that casts doubt on the entire prosecution case. The impression was given by prosecution and judge that McCulloch was the mastermind who planned the operation. In fact, says McCulloch, he played only a tiny part in the enterprise. He never knew Karl Wheeler or Sarah Wilson. He owed a lot of money to a drugs dealer in Luton who, McCulloch claims, was the real Mr Big.

The dealer told McCulloch that unless he went to Gatwick to meet Wheeler and Sarah Wilson on their return with the drugs from the Caribbean, he and his family would be beaten up. In fact, says McCulloch, he decided in the end not to meet Wheeler, phoned Wheeler up on his mobile from a pub near Gatwick airport to ask if he was all right, and was arrested in the pub soon afterwards.

The evidence against him was the single phone call he made to Wheeler. There was no money in his bank account nor any suggestion that he had got rich on drugs. As soon as he was arrested, he told police about the "Mr Big" behind the importation, named him, gave them his address, telephone number and car registration, and offered to give evidence against him. Amazingly, the police video of the arrival of Wheeler, Wilson and the drugs at Gatwick airport clearly showed the very man whom McCulloch had named. The man, who had two drugs convictions, was plainly directing the operation. Yet he was never even arrested.

McCulloch's story was strongly supported at the trial at Croydon crown court. Police, customs and prosecution said they had tried to question the man named by McCulloch, but could not find him. A Detective Constable Whitington told the court: "I and other officers went to the address (in Luton). We were let in. We saw a photograph of him. We have not been able to arrest him."

This story was repeated several times during the trial. Though they knew everything about Mr Big, prosecution, police and HM customs just could not find him.

McCulloch is convinced this was a case of "controlled importation" of drugs in which police and customs cooperate with informers to set up drugs deals so they can arrest and catch the "minnows", the aiders and abetters of the deals, and allow the informers, who are often the main dealers, to go free. (For a classic case of this type see *The Hunting of the Nark*, in *Eye* 959.)

The *Eye* asked HM customs what attempts since the trial had been made to track down the elusive Mr Big and charge him. A spokesman for their special investigations unit admitted that the man had appeared on the incriminating video and replied: "We have not arrested or charged this man. We do not believe he was capable of setting up such a deal. We can't just arrest people and charge them because they appear on a video at Gatwick airport."

Whoops! The spokesman appeared to have forgotten that another defendant in the case, Trevor Smith, was convicted of taking part in the drug-running and was sent down for 17 years. The only substantial evidence against him was that he was alleged to be an extremely indistinct black man on the video at Gatwick airport (an allegation Smith vigorously denied).

Goodieson-Wickes

■ IF YOU want to benefit from the rapid advance of private healthcare under "new" Labour, it helps a lot if you are a Tory.

The chief beneficiary of the fantastic demand for agency nurses is the British Nursing Agency, owned by Nestor Healthcare. A prominent director of Nestor is Dr Charles Goodison-Wickes, who was Tory MP for Wimbledon from 1987 to 1997.

He was a fairly nondescript backbencher but his private healthcare interests since he lost his seat to "new" Labour in a fantastic 17.9 percent swing have soared. Nestor's interim profits to June last year were up 47 percent. This was almost entirely due to the inexhaustible demand for agency nurses in the NHS.

High Principals

SPINNING JENNY

OVER Christmas the *Eye* told the strange story of Hendon College's generous provision of free private health care for principal Jenny Hoyland and four top executives.

The company which provides the health care, whose wares are also puffed by the authorities to all college staff, is Burke Ford Healthcare of the Burke Ford Reed group. The *Eye* asked the principal if she knew that the Burke Ford Reed group had been exposed in 1997 by the *Eye* and the *Times Education Supplement* as paying £600 a month to the former chief executive of the Association of Colleges, Roger Ward. Ward had puffed the group's healthcare in circular letters to the colleges.

Jenny Hoyland replied that she "was aware of these untested allegations" but that Burke Ford Reed had been "selected as most suitable to the college requirements". After several critical articles in both publications, Ward resigned.

Soon after the piece about Hendon was published two anonymous readers contacted the *Eye* with the information that Jenny Hoyland lives with, er, Roger Ward. On 29 December, the *Eye* asked the principal if this was true, and, if so, whether she might have declared the association to the *Eye* or to the college when it was selecting a private healthcare group.

No reply. So the *Eye* put the questions to the college. Here comes the answer, received on 14 January. "Mrs Hoyland is not available to comment. The College does not wish to make any comments."

NEW YEAR GOOD NEWS 1

JOHN GIDDINS, former rep at Doncaster College for the lecturers' union NATFHE, has won his case for unfair dismissal. The case, for which the college flew a witness over from South Africa at public expense, lasted 12 days. The tribunal was unanimous. Among the interesting facts to emerge were:

● College personnel director Nina Ashurst admitted that she was never interviewed for her job and was not appropriately qualified for it (except of course that she is married to the principal Terry Ashurst).

● Asked by a colleague about the reason for the large number of flagpoles at the college, Dr Ashurst wittily replied: "They are there to string up John Giddins."

The remedy for the unfair dismissal will be discussed at a future tribunal. (For background see *Eyes* 927, 928, 929, 933, 942, 947, 960.)

NEW YEAR GOOD NEWS 2

NATFHE representatives Andrea Kinneally and David Jenkins have won their case for unfair dismissal against Southwark College. The tribunal case lasted eight days and the decision was unanimous.

The chief reason for the dismissal was the refusal of the college to respect the contractual rights of the two lecturers.

FACT TO REMEMBER: Dorothy Jones, principal of Southwark College and a keen supporter of "new" Labour, is a former NATFHE rep and a member of the editorial board of a very left-wing journal called the *Leveller* (RIP).

NEW YEAR GOOD NEWS 3

ALMOST a year after the *Eye* first revealed the nepotism in the business school at Anglia Polytechnic University, the dean of the school, Prof Hugh Jenkins, has "relinquished his post".

The man who made the complaints about nepotism, John Watts, then head of the management development division, was promptly suspended and has been kicking his heels at public expense ever since. He has now been unconditionally reinstated by the university.

The future of Jonathan Jenkins, son of Hugh, whose performance as a lecturer after he was appointed and promoted under his father left a lot to be desired, remains uncertain. He has been off sick for a year and his chances of re-employment when he returns were described to the *Eye* as "below zero".

(For background see MBA — MY BOY'S ALRIGHT, *Eye* 942, and issues 943, 945, 946, 947.)

You can write to Paul Foot at Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG, or leave a message for him on 0171 287 3183

RETURN OF THE WHIGS

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CAROLINE =(m) THOMSON

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"There are 17 people in this country who count and to say I am intimate with every one of them is the understatement of the century." (NB. There are 17 people on this page.)

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Liberal Democrats

DEREK SCOTT

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Former European Commissioner.
Founder member of the SDP.

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Liberal Democrat peer.
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and his wife...
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Former PA to Lord Jenkins of Hillhead,
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Former SDP candidate in Fulham, 1986.
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ADVISER ON EUROPE AND DEFENCE TO PRIME MINISTER TONY BLAIR.

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Joint author with Roger Liddle of The Blair Revolution (1996).
Former Lambeth Labour councillor with Roger Liddle.
Former Labour campaigns director.
Former consultant to Prima Europe.
Lives next door to Sir Ian Wrigglesworth.
Former employer of Derek Draper.

DEREK DRAPER
Former personal assistant to Peter Mandelson.
Former director of Prima Europe/GPC Market Access. Sacked over "cash for access" consultancy scandal in summer of 1998.

DEREK SCOTT
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SDP candidate in Swindon, 1983,1987.
ADVISER ON ECONOMICS TO TONY BLAIR AT 10 DOWNING STREET.

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In the City

"ANOTHER fine mess" is the best way to describe the latest legal fiasco in the Asil Nadir saga — the quashing by the court of appeal of the conviction of pilot Peter Dimond for assisting the former Polly Peck tycoon to escape the clutches of the Serious Farce Office.

For once the SFO is not to blame for what is just the latest in a series of embarrassing legal setbacks since Nadir flew away to northern Cyprus in May 1993: charges have already been dropped against his co-defendant, company secretary John Turner; and the conviction of his former key associate Elisabeth Forsyth has been quashed.

The court of appeal ruling does, however, raise a serious question about what happens in the unlikely event that Nadir summons up the courage to fly back to Britain. The answer may well be that a new arrest warrant would need to be issued.

That of itself may not be a serious problem in the view of those with knowledge of the SFO case. But the £34m question is what happens then to those 1993 fraud charges? As all the events relating to the £1.3bn Polly Peck collapse are already more than eight years old, the feasibility of a successful prosecution, which would not occur before 2001, is fading — especially given the likely availability of witnesses and their memories.

Which is exactly why Nadir continues to issue his threat of challenging the SFO while remaining secure in northern Cyprus and Turkey — neither of which would extradite him anyway. Another year and Nadir could be home free although he may not want to call Britain home any more: a prosecution for pillaging Polly Peck may not be practical, but there could be other charges brought over his bankruptcy or even his escape.

For the Dimond ruling — which may yet be appealed by the egg-covered crown prosecution service (CPS) who brought the case — leaves the legal position surrounding Nadir's departure if possible even more confused.

Dimond was released from a two-year sentence given in August last year because the appeal court, headed by the Lord Chief Justice Lord Bingham, held that at the time Dimond arranged for Nadir to fly from Britain to France the Turkish Delight was not technically on bail although awaiting trial. So Dimond could not have perverted the course of justice by enabling Nadir to breach his bail conditions.

The issue of whether or not Nadir was on bail had been debated but not clearly decided in several court hearings even before Dimond was arrested a year ago. Indeed, one of those who agreed Nadir had always been on bail was none other than Lord Bingham himself when master of the rolls!

This complex question had arisen because of deciding the fate of the £3.5m bail put up by Nadir and two sureties in 1991. The SFO sought to have the £2m bail and £1.5m sureties forfeited. This was opposed by Turkish Cypriot businessman Ramadan Guney who was a surety for £1m.

Guney's case was that when Nadir appeared in court in June 1992 at the start of the preparatory proceedings for his trial, as bail was not renewed or even discussed at that time the Polly Peck fraudster had been arraigned and so had surrendered to the custody of the court meaning the existing bail terms had lapsed. This situation was not changed at subsequent pre-trial hearings up to April 1993.

However, the trial judge Mr Justice Tucker ruled that Nadir had indeed been on bail so Guney must pay up. This decision was supported by two judges in the divisional court in 1994.

But this interpretation was overturned in February 1995 by a two to one verdict in the appeal court with Bingham the dissenting vote. He declared that as the trial judge had not ordered Nadir to surrender to the court he was still technically on bail and Guney must pay. The two other judges, however, declared that Nadir had in effect surrendered by being arraigned.

This view was unanimously upheld by the law lords in May 1996 meaning Guney did not have to pay. But even in that ruling the law lords accepted that Nadir was a fugitive because he had been in the custody of the court and had been given bail — be it inferred and on unspecified terms — by the trial judge. How otherwise could Nadir be walking around if he was in custody?

Nor was that the last time this point was made before Dimond's trial. In December 1997 the recorder of London, Sir Lawrence Verney, ruled that Nadir had been on bail when deciding that the £2m bail money should go to the Polly Peck creditors. A month later Dimond was arrested on his way out of Britain after a brief visit from his home in Northern Cyprus.

The result of the Bingham rethink would seem to be that yes, Nadir was a fugitive escaped prisoner; but, no, Dimond is not guilty of aiding his escape! Whether this triumph for logic will result in Dimond receiving any compensation remains to be seen. Even Bingham considered he was "somewhat fortunate" to be released on such a complex technicality.

More interesting will be whether fellow Asil acolytes David Hamilton (who flew away with Dimond and provided the plane that took Nadir from France to Northern Cyprus) or former stockbroker Jason Davies (who handled many of the dubious offshore Polly Peck share deals for Nadir) will now fancy their chances of coming back. Both would probably have no problem.

But the same is not true of the man himself, which is why Nadir is likely for the foreseeable future to remain in his refuge continuing to talk about suing the SFO. A threat he has been making for years but never carried out because he is not prepared to put up the money to do so — never mind take the risk of coming back which is what the courts may require before letting him challenge the SFO.

FINANCIAL journalists are never slow to highlight the failings of those in the City or business who fail to predict future events correctly. There is an implicit assumption that they are in the know — especially where shares are concerned. After all, they spend all their time either with the dealmakers, those for whom they do the deals or their PR men.

So what is more natural than that they should share this undoubted wisdom and inside knowledge with readers by pointing them towards the road to stock market riches with money-making share tips?

Yet, as last year manifestly proved, these supposedly informed tipsters are just as wrong as those they so regularly chastise for failing to perform.

> A typical day at sea might start with a genital stretch-and-tone session on the Sun Deck; *Thomson Cruises*

Despite the roller coaster ride 1998 was a very good year for the stock market. The FT 100 index ended up 14 percent and the broader FT All Share was ahead by 12 percent. But only one team of newspaper tipsters — the *Express* — managed to beat that performance with their shares for 1998. The *Mail on Sunday* was next best — it managed to equal the lower rise in the All Share. The rest clearly need new crystal balls or informants.

The *Sunday Times* pundits beat the All Share with only one of nine new year tips of which only three even made money. The worst was down by 43 percent. On average its tips were down 8 percent.

Its rival the *Sunday Telegraph* was little better. Only three of its 11 tips for 1998 came out ahead although all three beat both indices. The best more than doubled. The worst halved. Because of the big rises on two selections the average was just below break even. But the average loss on those which fell was an impressive 26 percent!

Nor were the investment gurus on the daily City pages any more blessed with wallet warming foresight. The *Times* Tempus column managed to produce not a single winner from six selections. The smallest loss was 5 percent; the biggest 30 percent; the average almost 17 percent.

Given such dismal performances it might be thought that these flawed forecasters would be reticent about making any further predictions for a year when many City experts fear the long expected reality check for the stock market. But no. They are all at it again. But then that happens when you think only others know nothing.

THE full extent of Barclays' Russian disaster is said to be much worse than so far admitted. Part of the more than £250m losses are said to have been caused as much by incompetence as greed.

Barclays is said to have lost up to $80m to just one now bankrupt Russian bank because it did not notice for several months that it had no margin for its loan. By the time the Russian crisis hit and the rouble was devalued, Barclays had an unsecured $45m exposure. Needless to say those involved are now keeping that part of the story under wraps.

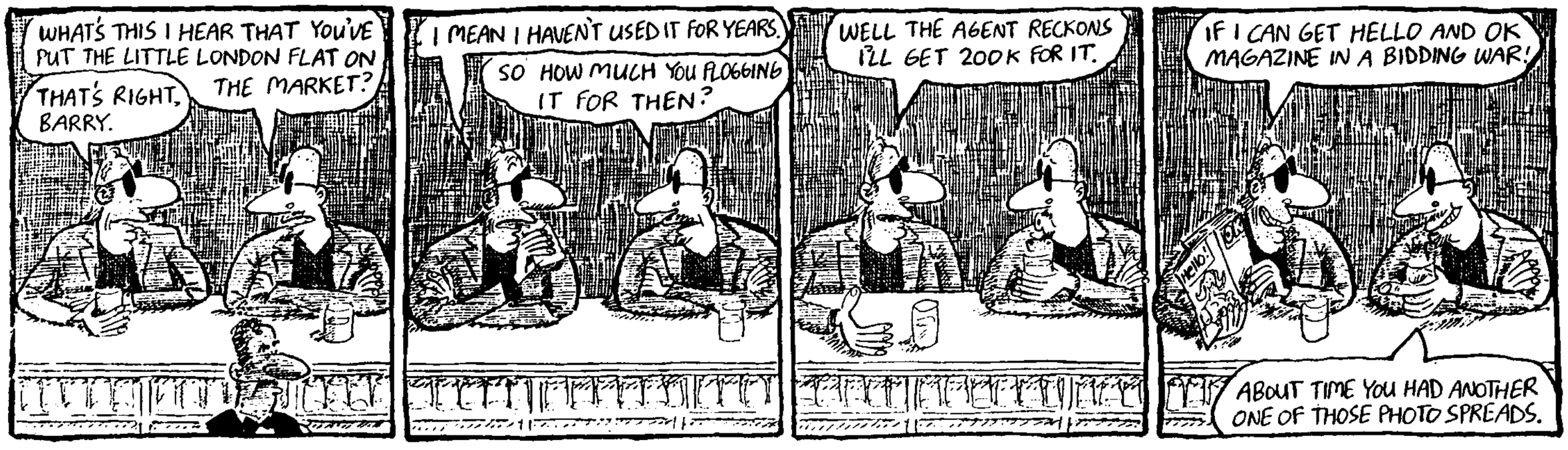
THOSE puzzled by the willingness of the mysterious Barclay twins to lend their offshore millions to back Mr Low Rent, Philip Green's bid to break up Sears, should recall that one of their earliest partners was another City pariah, David Rowland.

"Spotty" was their man in a number of unsuccessful casino deals. But he and they made money together and went to live in tax free Monaco where the equally unloved Green now resides. No doubt the Barclay newspapers (*Sunday Business*, *Scotsman*) will give a full and frank coverage of Green's previous business failures and colourful connections, such as loan shark Tony Schneider, and jailed Landhurst Leasing boss Ted Ball.

'Slicker'

Celeb

LIGGER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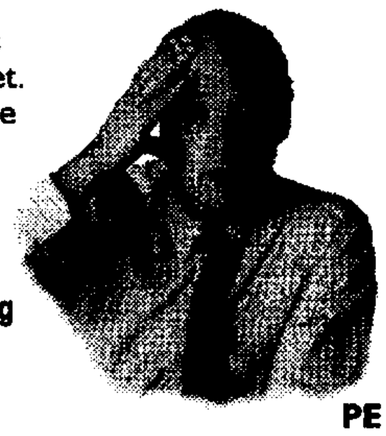

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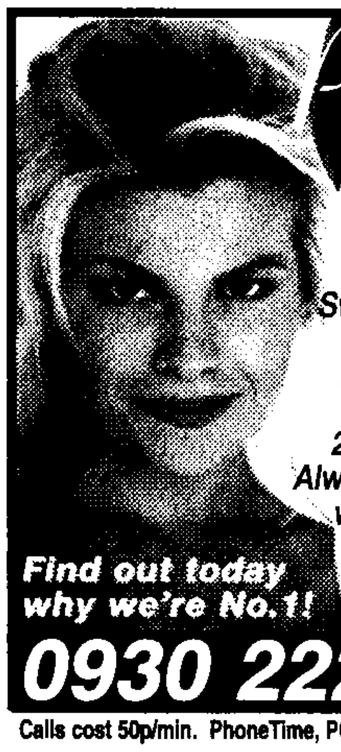
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DESPERATE ICHTHYOLOGIST needs £5000 for conservation of endangered fishes. Natwest 55-81-26, 78892171.

OLD AGE pensioner desperately trying to buy own flat. Any help appreciated. Lloyds 30-94-80, A/C 2694223.

LADY 40 – thrown out of family home by debt ridden husband who demanded I sell my body! Please help! Sort code: 09-01-26, Acc No: 26570012 – Abbey National.

HELP! DEPRESSED and sinking, any sum gratefully appreciated. Natwest 52-30-56, 02251574.

STRUGGLING SMALL BUSINESS needs help urgently to pay debts (£10,000) – family to support – any help really appreciated. Genuine. Thankyou. Barclays 20 26 62, 90259616.

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DISABLED, NEED £450 for Open University, THANKS. Abbey National – 09-01-26, 38617743. Box 3068.

MATURE STUDENT needs £3,000 to escape from hostile landlord. Abbey National 13814121, sort code 090126. THANKYOU.

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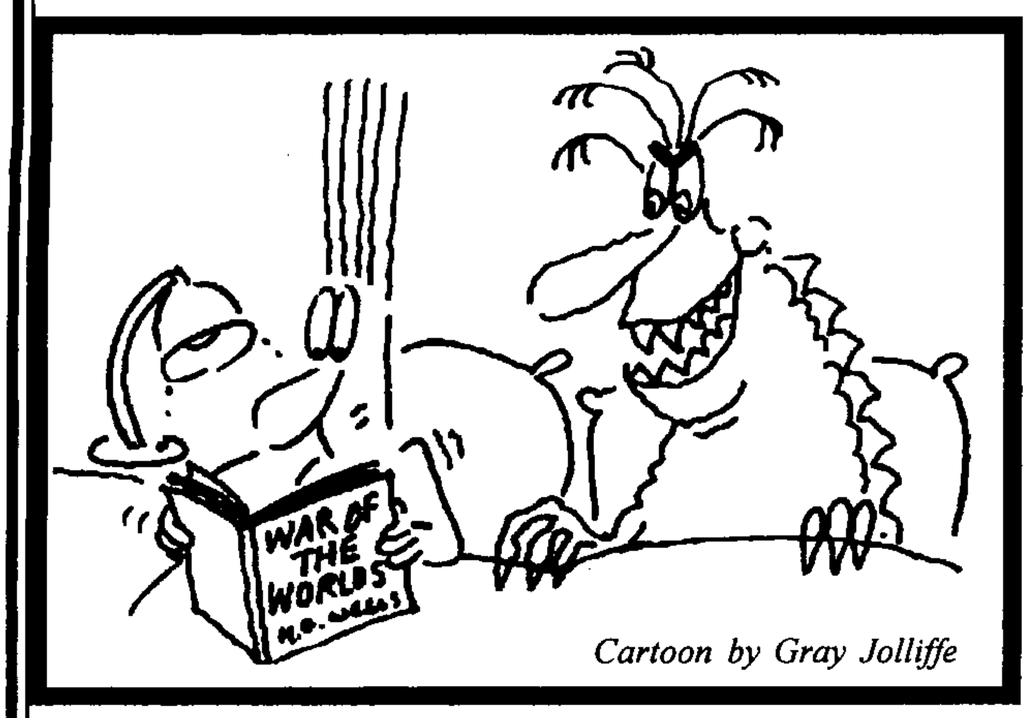

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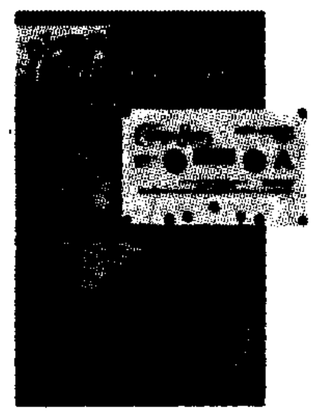

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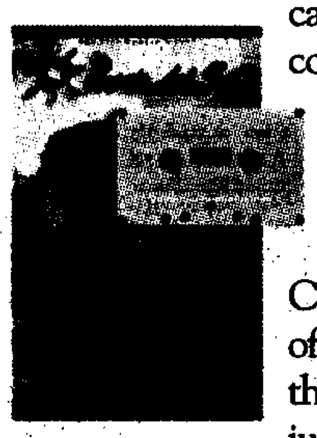

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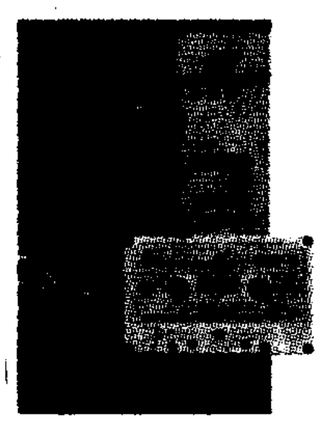

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